

A Quarterly of New Literature

ACCENT

R. W. STALLMAN: Kafka's Cage

WILLIAM SANSOM: Displaced Persons

R. V. CASSILL: Fragments for Reference

WALLACE FOWLIE: The French Literary Mind

REGINALD L. COOK: Big Medicine in 'Moby Dick'

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EDITORS: Kerker Quinn, Charles Shattuck, George Scouffas, Donald Hill,
Arthur Carr, John Schacht, Carl Hartman, Lester Heller.

ASSISTANTS: Gordon Clarke, Penny Hartman, Sally Jauch.

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CONTRIBUTORS

KENNETH BURKE is the author of several critical works, the last to appear being *A Grammar of Motives*.

R. V. CASSILL teaches English at Monticello College in Illinois. He has done graduate work at Iowa and served for four years in the Pacific in the Army Medical Corps. His first story was in the *Atlantic Monthly* in December.

REGINALD L. COOK is Director of the Bread Loaf School of English and author of a book on Thoreau which Houghton Mifflin will publish in 1948.

WALLACE FOWLIE, well-known as a poet and a commentator on French literary trends, is on the University of Chicago faculty.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA (1899-1936), Spain's great poet-playwright, was shot by the Fascists. New Directions has issued several books of Lorca translations.

ARTHUR GREGOR is a young engineer and lives in New York. His poems have been in *Yale Poetry Review*, the *Saturday Review*, *Poetry*, etc.

DONALD JENKS lives in Cleveland.

JENE LYON, after two years' war service, is attending the University of New Mexico, majoring in Inter-American Affairs, and editing the campus creative arts magazine. This is his first published poetry.

JAMES MERRILL is a young New York poet who has contributed to *Poetry* and *Kenyon Review*.

FREDERICK NIES, too, lives in New York.

WILLIAM SANSOM, a leader among younger British writers, has published two story-collections, *Fireman Flower* and *Three*.

ROBERT WOOSTER STALLMAN is in the English department at Kansas and on the staff of the *Western Review*. He is at work on two critical anthologies, *The Art of Modern Fiction* (to include the Kafka essay) and *Critiques*.

ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

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WALLACE FOWLIE:

The French Literary Mind

I

In the literary tradition of France, eloquence, both oral and written, is a ceremony. It is true that in every literary tradition, eloquence, by its very nature, must become to some degree the stylization of language, but in the French the instinct to make of language a highly formalized expression is deeper and more permanent than in other traditions. Each of the great masterpieces in French literature seems extraordinarily aware of the public to which it is addressing itself, of the presence of a public, of a public mind which must be subjugated and enchanted according to well-established rules of subjugation and enchantment.

And that is why the first trait of the French literary mind always seems to be its sociability or even what we might call its worldliness. The French writer is always addressing some one, even when he is speaking on that subject which has become one of his favorites since the days of the Renaissance when Montaigne wrote his *Essays*: the subject of solitude. Because of this attitude of the French writer, which is more an instinct than an attitude, born of a need to communi-

cate and to establish a relationship between his thought and the minds of other men, his works are characterized by a tone of bareness, of separateness. They often give the effect of arias sung in the midst of great silence, sung at some distance from the world, even if they are directed toward the world. This is sometimes described as the classical spirit in French art, and works composed in this spirit have the inflexions of a pleader and a lawyer whose skill is used to combat and convince and seduce.

Such works, and they have occurred at all periods in French history, illustrate the solitude of literary speech. But such speech-solitude, because of its ceremonial aspect, is floodlighted. Its contrived effect, so carefully planned to provoke, hold, subjugate and enchant, may often appear a pure theatricality. The writer in the French tradition resembles a performing artist. In French schools the primary literary exercise is that of textual explication, by which a single page of a writer serves to reveal his particular art and thought, and even the art and thought of his period. Only a very highly self-conscious and even histrionic art would permit such examination and such treatment, whereby a novelist would be studied not in his novel, but in a single paragraph from his novel, and where a poet would be studied in a single sonnet. This habit of study has helped to convert French literature into a series of celebrated set-pieces. Renan is known for his prayer on the Acropolis and Proust for the passage on the madeleine cookie dipped in a cup of linden tea.

A single page can be separated from its book and exist autonomously in its own brilliance, in much the same way as a speech in a French conversation may be struck off from its context and found to be a distinct and singular creation. At dinner parties, where the guests are French, the general effect may be that of conversation or at times of hubbub, but when listened to more attentively, the conversation of the ten dinner guests, if there be ten, will turn out to be ten monologues, each recited simultaneously and independently. French eloquence, both that in print and that produced orally under the stimulus of a physically present public, is expression ritualistically conceived.

The reason for this solitariness of the French literary voice, what we might name the primary secret of the French literary mind, is the fervent identification it establishes with the past. If the finished product of French writing often gives us the impression of an aria sung in the center of a vast space, of a form stripped of non-essentials and bare in an almost heroic vulnerability, we know that its strength

comes from its alliance with and allegiance to the tradition of its past. The dependence of a French writer on other writers who preceded him is acknowledged and emphasized. French art is knowingly the renewal of tradition and not the discovery of the new. The writer in France learns his particular rôle and vocation in terms of those past writers with whom he is in sympathy as well as those with whom he is in disagreement. Many French masterpieces have been born from a quarrel. The loneliness of the French writer, which now might be termed his uniqueness, comes from this will to determine himself by his affiliations and disagreements. The French writer knows that originality is an unimportant and even an illusory goal in art. The seeming new really draws upon the old.

I have taken courses in French literature both in America and Paris where the professor actually never got to the author announced as the subject of the course, where all the time was spent in discussing the forerunners of the author. We learned all about the readings which the author had accomplished during his lifetime and to what degree he had been influenced by them, but when we finally arrived at the work itself, the final lecture had been given, and all we had learned was what the literary work had come from and nothing about what it was.

Such an approach, which treats literature as a renovation of the past, as a prolongation rather than as an original creation, explains to some degree the attitude of the French people toward their writers. The pride which the French feel in their writers, and their awareness of them even if they don't always read them, are traits found more in France than in other countries. The recent death in Paris of Paul Valéry, in July 1945, became an event of national significance. I refer to the example of Valéry in this connection because he is as far removed as it is possible to be from the type of popular writer. As a poet he is one of the most difficult France has ever produced, and one who will rank among the greatest; and as a prose writer, he is even more difficult. The stylistic and philosophical difficulty of Valéry's art would seem to relegate him to a very small circle of initiates, but it is a fact that, even long before his death, he was a universal figure in Paris, a symbol and justification of French pride in literary tradition.

In the homage which France has paid to Paul Valéry, the dignity of the literary mind has been extolled once again. The case of Valéry signifies that once more in France acknowledgment has been made to the belief that the literary artist, no matter how esoteric or difficult,

represents a significant fusion between the present and the past. Valéry has not always been kind or approving in his treatment of the past. He has derided, for example, and in a tone of considerable malice, some of the most hallowed sentences of Pascal, sentences which have been explicated for generations in the *lycées* and universities, and precisely those belonging to passages which we have been calling arias. But the French, as well as possessing a sense of tradition, have an iconoclastic sense which rather enjoys a scene of destruction when it is carried out with deftness and critical sharpness. Valéry's very attack on the sentences of Pascal has thrown them into greater relief than ever, and one day there will be books written for and against Valéry's attack on Pascal.

If Valéry is anti-Pascal and anti-philosophers in general, he is on the other hand a disciple of Mallarmé, who directed him closely in his vocation as poet. This discipleship has helped to define Valéry's particular position in French poetry and to re-define the art of his master. Valéry's debt to Mallarmé is so significant that professors in future courses on Valéry will perhaps not feel compelled to go beyond a discussion of Mallarmé's poetry.

The French, more insistently than other national groups, use the names of their writers as symbols which stand for much more than the actual literary work. They represent attitudes of mind, and efforts, which have been successful in varying degrees, to study the mystery of man. The French use the names of Racine, Descartes, Villon as others say Orpheus, Venus, Socrates. And the writers also use these names, almost as talismans or as saints and sinners who are invoked during the writers' self-examinations. The literary past in France is constantly testifying and representing. Thus Valéry orientates his own thought by declaring himself a critic of Pascal and a disciple of Mallarmé.

The art of speech in France is almost identical, as we have said, with the art of persuasion. One of the surest means to persuade is to speak intimately and personally, to take the reader into confidence, to speak confidences. When the French writer employs this device, he speaks, not about his mother or wife or child as the writer of another tradition might do, but about the author whom he reads passionately and with whom he has formed a spiritual liaison. Baudelaire is most personal when he writes of Edgar Allen Poe; Claudel when he tells the effect of Rimbaud on his life; Valéry when he describes his conversations with Mallarmé.

At moments of national crisis, the French turn to their writers, because the writer is by definition in France the man who writes about the world of his heart but who also looks at the world itself and seeks to integrate in his writing some considerations concerning the affairs of the world. On the one hand, Valéry can compose such a pure poem as *Narcisse*, which contains the description of a forest scene and the exploration of a psychological dilemma. And on the other hand, he can write such an article as *La Crise de l'Esprit* which, although it was written soon after the end of the first World War, stands today as one of the most penetrating statements on the political and sociological dilemmas of modern man. The first sentence of the essay has become a celebrated exordium in France: *Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles*. It is this kind of sentence we have been trying to describe as the beginning of an aria. It is both resonant and arresting: "We civilizations know now that we are mortal." It has the solitariness of a single voice speaking to a vast public, which in this case is France and the modern world. It is the voice of a pleader who is going to speak, through deep sensitivity to the past, to his own world on the subject of the abyss of history.

So the literary mind in France, nourished as it is on the past, may analyze whatever subject persists in tormenting man: politics, morals, theology, philosophy. Literature, the most complex of the arts, involves all these subjects and many others, and in France, more than in other countries, the people turn to the particular form given to these problems by the literary artist. The ideas of the 16th century are perhaps best expounded in the *Essays* of Montaigne; the moral and religious problems of the 17th century may be studied in the sermons of Bossuet; modern man's psychological barriers are for the French more significantly analyzed by a Baudelaire or by a Proust than by a Freud. When we read such a passage as that of Valéry which begins with the words, *Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles*, we realize that the writer in France has replaced the prophet. The writer has learned, through the exercise of his form, which is the practice of lucidity, of stripping and condensing, how to see everything in its absolute meaning. Valéry in his passage on the mortality of civilization, and Péguy, another writer-prophet of France, when he speaks of the modern tendency of changing a mystical state into a political state, both attain in their writing to the absolute meaning of an event.

II

But this rôle of tradition in the make-up of the French literary mind is only one aspect. It gives to the writer a feeling of solidarity with the past and an urgency to continue a movement rather than to found a new one. This dependence of the French writer on earlier writers, which grows in many cases to something akin to religious fervor, is not however an enslavement of mind, but, paradoxically, a liberation. Montaigne is better able to formulate his own thoughts when he reads Seneca and Sextus Empiricus. Pascal, in denouncing Montaigne, found his own voice in the 17th century; and Gide, today, in his approval of Montaigne and the pleasure he derives from reading the *Essays*, has received confirmation in many of his own attitudes as writer.

The French genius, however, cannot be defined solely by this habit of integration with the past. French genius is not just one thing. It is characterized by infinite variety and richness, by the most opposing traits. After establishing a relationship with the past, it then establishes another kind of relationship with the present. The second secret of the French literary mind is the dialogue it creates with another mind of its time. No major view on man, and no particular kind of sensitivity is allowed to exist alone in France for very long. The French genius asserts itself by creating some miracle of equilibrium. It discovers in its own age an opposing voice, usually of power equal to its own, and therefore is able to grow more vibrantly according to its own distinctive qualities. French art seems to develop in the form of a dialogue. But this dialogue is conciliation, or rather balance and counterpoint. Each of the two voices remains independent and clear, but much of its clarity and independence is derived from the existence of the other voice.

The provinces of France, each one so different from all the others, prefigure and control to some degree the multiple varieties or variations of French art. Long before the classical opposition of Corneille and Racine, so minutely studied in the *lycées*, there existed at the very beginnings of France, in the 12th century, one of the most dramatic dialogues between French minds. Throughout the history of France, Brittany has produced literary minds which seem to be characterized by agility and suppleness on the one hand, and by a tendency toward mysticism and poetry on the other. Pierre Abélard, the 12th century philosopher, who was also poet and lover at one time in his life, had this kind of mind: both critical and mystical, both lyric and inde-

pendent. He is usually considered one of the forerunners of the French analytical and rationalist spirit, adept in argumentation and subtlety. But Abélard's philosophy and theology were attacked by a contemporary, a man equally powerful but in a different way. Saint Bernard was Abélard's adversary. He was a Burgundian, of a race vastly unlike the Breton. The genius of the Burgundians is that of organizing, constructing, synthesizing. The Roman legionnaires had settled in Burgundy and had perhaps bequeathed some of their respect for authority and their sense of order and even their physical prowess. I understand that it is still believed that the best soldiers in France come from Burgundy.

A clash was inevitable between these two men. Abélard's spirit was critical, analytical and even destructive; whereas Bernard's spirit was bent upon protecting authority and tradition, eager to preserve and synthesize, and determined to use his full power in accomplishing those ends. So Bernard, the man of action, opposed Abélard, the reflective thinker. The passion of order and synthesis opposed the passion of thought and analysis. The same warning which Saint Bernard gave to Abélard in the 12th century has been spoken in our day by Valéry in the essay already quoted, *La Crise de l'Esprit*. Man's investigation and knowledge may grow to such an extent that they become dangerous for himself and for the world. That was why Saint Bernard intervened in the career of Abélard, and that is the reason today for Valéry's question about knowledge. A vast amount of knowledge was necessary to permit the Americans to kill in the space of a few seconds 40,000 Japanese. We can easily realize the threat which such knowledge represents for civilization. It is not exaggerated to say that today a civilization appears to us as fragile as a human life.

The 12th century dialogue of Abélard and Bernard, which was a pattern of counterpoint established between a spirit of analysis and a spirit of synthesis, continues in varying ways in each great period of French history. In the Renaissance, the humanism of a Rabelais who believed in the natural goodness of man, was offset by the humanism of a Calvin, who preached the corruption of human nature. In the 17th century, one of the most significant dialogues for the subsequent development of French writing, was that between Descartes and Pascal. Descartes furthered his so-called method of doubt so that human reason might attain to truth. It would not be fantastic to consider Descartes' philosophical treatise, *Discourse on Method*, the first of the psychological novels in French literature wherein reason in its

purest state is the protagonist. But Pascal, in the same years, and in no uncertain terms, was asking reason to humble itself: *Raison, humiliez-vous!*, and telling mankind that "the heart has its reasons which reason doesn't understand." Thus the intellectual enterprise or adventure of Descartes cannot be separated from the more deeply tormented and spiritual adventure of Pascal. One was necessary for the other in this persistent pattern of French thought where each age seeks to conciliate opposing tendencies, where analysis is opposed to synthesis, realism to idealism, action to contemplation, thought to sentiment.

More than other countries, France favors and supports and values the existence of opposing minds at any given moment of its history. In that country which has developed to such a high degree the art of argument and discussion and conversation, no single voice is ever allowed to be heard for any length of time. I suppose that no teacher ever had such abundant and even hysterical success as Abélard did, and yet his revolutionary spirit, brilliant as it was, negative and demolishing according to that form which holds and stimulates young students, was not unchallenged and was finally subjugated by the sterner, more dogmatic, although far less subtle and scintillating, spirit of Saint Bernard.

III

There exists throughout the history of French literature, from the earliest writings in the French language, the courtly romances, for example, of Chrétien de Troyes in the 12th century, up to the plays and novels of the existentialists in Paris today, a profound and persistent unity of inspiration. What unites all the major works of French literature is the psychological inquest of man, an inquest to which each one seems dedicated.

The effort to study man, to explore the secrets of his mind and his desires, to define his position with respect to life and death, to the cosmos and to truth, is the motivation and the activity of the French literary mind. Many answers have been given to these questions in the various periods of French history, but all the questions might be summarized by the one question: what is man? And this question provides the stimulation and subject matter of French writing, whether it be the *ballades* of the gangster-poet Villon in the 15th century or the involved psychological novel of Proust in the 20th century. The French writer turns instinctively not to the collective problems of mankind,

but to the personal, more secretive and individual problem of a man. He believes that only through the laborious exploration of self can he attain to any aspect of universal truth.

In the so-called central period of French culture, in the classical age of the 17th century, there occurred an exceptional harmonization between this permanent interest of the French writer in psychological study and the philosophically Christian view of man which lies at the basis of everything we call French. The study of man became, at that time, more uniquely than it had previously, the study of man's corruption. Classicism and Christianity were united by the doctrine that man is not born good. The mystery which man brings to the world is not his innocency, but his knowledge of evil, his corruptibility. This experience of evil is the subject matter of the tragedies of Racine, the maxims of La Rochefoucauld, the fables of La Fontaine and of every other literary work of the classical age.

The very method itself of Descartes, which was expounded in France as well as in Holland and elsewhere in Europe just prior to the reign of Louis XIV, consists in a descent into one's own mind and a removal from one's mind of all those notions falsely acquired which cannot be arrived at by rational intuition. We have already mentioned Descartes' *Discourse on Method* as a kind of introduction to the impressive list of psychological novels, the type of writing which, since the tragedies of Racine, has dominated French literature. Descartes' celebrated *Cogito, ergo sum* is the axiom on which he built his metaphysical system. It is the point of departure in a revolution not so much of ideas as of a method which has had a long history and which is not yet terminated.

Pascal, contemporary with Descartes, initiated a further revolution, which has had an equally fertile history. Descartes' analysis of the basic simple truths which man discovers in himself by means of his rational intuition is paralleled in time by Pascal's revolution of the human heart and of sentiment. The logic of Descartes, which is always however that of a single hero, is offset by the turbulent dark poetry of Pascal's torment. The "abyss," which he bears within himself, is Pascal's symbol of the barrier which separates him from truth and helps to objectify the personal anguish generated by his self-inquisition.

The psychological inquiry which has been carried on uninterruptedly by the French literary mind since Descartes and Pascal, continues in varying proportions the influence or the example of these two men. On the one hand, the spirit of a method may be primary. This be-

comes equivalent almost to a cult of ordering and organization, of evidence, analysis and synthesis where structure and compositional form are uppermost in the mind of the creative artist. Flaubert would be a leading example of this type of writer. And then, on the other hand, a spirit of disquietude and even of anguish, manifesting itself in the lineage of Pascal, where the study of man is carried on in an austere trembling and fearfulness, where the complexities of the heart overbalance the logical reasonableness of the mind. Some of the greatest artists belong to this lineage: Racine, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mauriac, Malraux. To them I would attach the contemporary group of French writers known as the existentialists.

Since 1944, the existentialist movement has occupied a central position in French literary life. I refer to it in this general discussion of the French literary mind because of its own significance and value and because, as the most recent expression of French thought, it recapitulates and illustrates much of what we have already said.

Like everything new, existentialism has become a vogue. It has been examined by philosophers and by journalists, and it has been distorted by both. Even here in America, existentialism has had a kind of vogue. The leading existentialist, M. Jean-Paul Sartre, has visited America two or three times. His picture has appeared in *Life Magazine*. Existentialism has been discussed journalistically by *Time Magazine* and *The New Yorker*. More serious critical articles have appeared in *Horizon* of London, *Partisan Review* and *Kenyon Review*. Translations of the novels and plays have begun to appear. *No Exit* and *The Flies* by Sartre have been produced in several American theatres.

In Paris, the vogue has been infinitely more pronounced. In fact, at times it has been hysterical. It has obsessed every type of French mind. Especially the mind of women, perhaps. But it is always women who assure the success of any book and any literary movement. But also, professors of the Sorbonne are becoming interested in existentialism, and I am confident that the nimble-witted waiters in the Paris cafés and bistros have contributed to the popularization of the new writing.

One of the latest reports to reach me says that a young Dominican father has been lecturing on Sartre's 722-page book on existentialist philosophy, called *L'Etre et le Néant* (1943), as seriously and thoroughly as if he were analyzing the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. The report continues to say that the Dominican's public is

composed of respectable ladies and innocent young girls who take voluminous notes. I keep wondering what the priest will do with the final sentence of this long work of Sartre when he comes to it. It is a very brief sentence which seemingly summarizes the book and in which Sartre gives his existentialist-definition of man. The sentence is simply this: "Man is a useless passion." (*L'homme est une passion inutile.*)

The most constant criticism levelled at existentialists is the obscenity used in many of their books and the tendency to deal with the dis-solute or degrading aspects of human nature. Sartre was recently told about a woman who, in a polite conversation, by mistake uttered a coarse word and excused herself by saying, "I believe I am becoming an existentialist."

For the particular purpose of our subject, existentialism illustrates all the permanent traits of the French literary mind, such as they appear to us. But especially in the close fervent exploration of psychological man. In Sartre's play, *No Exit*, he forces each of the three characters to turn inwardly upon himself and to reveal to the other two his most personal secrets and motives. The first part of the play is a reduction to zero of pretence and deceit and even imagination on the part of the three characters. It is an effort to begin all over again from the most basic and simple truths concerning the three case histories. This is in a way an application of what is usually called the Cartesian method, which is the most lucidly rational approach to any given problem. But this is only the beginning of the play. The three characters find themselves in hell, which appears to them in the form of a Second-Empire living-room, and here we come upon the Pascalian aspect of the play. The room is hell for the three characters because they are not free to escape from it. It is what Pascal called the "abyss," or the obstacle in one's nature which prevents happiness.

This play of Sartre's contains therefore two subjects which we associate especially with French literature. First, the logic of an analysis or an inquisition which may be called the Cartesian influence; and secondly, the problem of man's happiness or salvation, which may be called the Pascalian influence. Cartesian and Pascalian are two adjectives which designate method and problem, and their commingling in the writings of Descartes and Pascal themselves, as well as in subsequent writers like Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Sartre is the specifically French quality and paradox in literary art.

We use the word "paradox," or we might have used "irony," be-

cause of the extreme logicity and sense of order with which the French artist approaches the problems of the most dizzying illogicality. The towering disproportion between man's desire (idealism or thirst or aspiration) and man's capacity (realism or limitation or existence) is the subject matter of literature, and the French consider it with a disarming clarity of vision and a mathematical preciseness, whether the work be the 17th century *Méditations* of Descartes or the 20th century treatise on *L'Etre et le Néant* of Sartre.

Existentialism, as the newest expression of the French paradox, takes its point of departure from a fundamental axiom, "Existence precedes essence," as fundamental as Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum*. Sartre has often repeated that man exists first and then defines himself later. Man is only what he makes himself into. He projects himself into his future. Immediately with such statements, Sartre defines doctrines on human liberty and responsibility which are strongly reminiscent of Pascal's. If the key words used by the existentialists in describing man's state, despair, abandonment, anguish, nausea, have their counterpart in Pascal's vocabulary, Descartes' sentence about man conquering himself rather than the world (*se vaincre plutôt soi-même que le monde*) is likewise applicable to Sartre's belief that man is the ensemble of his actions and that every human project has a universal value.

Existentialism has its roots in the past. Its writers have established a debate or a dialogue with other contemporary writers. And it has revised all the basic metaphysical and psychological problems of man: action, liberty, responsibility.

IV

The outstanding trait of the French genius, that on which all other traits depend, is its spirituality. I believe that the equilibrium which the French writer establishes between himself and the historical past, between himself and his contemporary world, and between himself and the problems of man, is due to an exceptional power of spiritual discernment. It is a willingness to avow and unmask the spiritual turmoil and aspiration of man. More than a willingness, it is a habit, centuries old, of considering virtue common sense, of considering intuition that faculty by which one attains truth. Literature in France has had an incomparable tradition in its awareness of a spiritual mission. No matter what the subject matter be, and no matter what the philosophical stand of the individual writer be, the most apparent

word in his vocabulary, and I dare say the most frequently used word in French literature, is *esprit* and its derivatives: *spirituel* and *spiritualité*. No matter what kind of writer is speaking on human destiny, a Villon or a Pascal or an existentialist, the mystery of the subject is best articulated by the word itself of spirituality.

Everything that can be designated by the world as essentially French seems to come from their understanding of the individual, of their prized concept, *la personne*. For the French, to comprehend the destiny of their country is to comprehend the destiny of man. France is the vocation and the study of the individual.

Throughout their history, the French have never ceased believing in what we might call the "absolute of man." I mean the absolute which exists in each man and which can be attained only through perpetual analysis of himself and struggle with himself. This belief in the absolute of man is what might be designated as French pride, vastly different from the humanistic pride of the Renaissance, when man was glorified sensuously by painters and poets, and vastly different from the racial pride of a culture myth. French pride has its roots in a profoundly pessimistic view of man: he has lost through greed and perversity a great heritage of peace which has to be won back by relentless struggle and purification.

This is the key to French writing in every century: in the poetry of Villon, in the story of Rabelais' giants, in the thoughts of Pascal, in the novels of André Malraux. French pride comes from this extraordinary awareness of man's imperfection and a courageous measuring of his dilemma. André Gide has summarized this in one of his sentences: *Je n'aime pas l'homme; j'aime ce qui le dévore*. ("I don't like man; I like what devours him.") But to this very special form of pessimism is added a particular kind of optimism: a belief in the dignity of this struggle, in the ultimate capacity for reform in man and society. Behind every limpid portrait of man which French civilization has produced, behind every Gothic representation of Judas, behind every character of Balzac, behind every clown of Rouault, rises the archetype of human greatness. France has given to the meaning of freedom the will to bind oneself to the ideal through a fierce embracing of what is actual and real and even debased in man.

I suppose that no nation in the world is so diverse as France, so divided, so made up of contradictory individuals. France to the outside world often resembles a multiplicity of political parties, of social classes, of beliefs and ideas. But especially, at those very moments in its history

when France appears to us the most divided, it appears to each Frenchman as one and unified. At the moments of greatest fever when France seems split asunder, it is then that she is magically composing past and future, fusing them, unifying, uniting and resolving. Its literary mind never allows France to lose its conscience.

Literature is the deepest memory of the world. In France, in particular, literature is the most powerful reassembling force of conscience. It is true that dogmas, philosophies and ideals will appear contradictory in France, and in any other country, for that matter. But if these contradictions, which are the product of the mind, become also the product of the literary mind and are cast into a formalized product, the artistic work, they have the chance of becoming a stabilizing factor in periods of turmoil and crisis. Literature is a vast register of everything: myths, psychology, philosophy, theology; but it is a reality, because of its form, which helps us to bear and understand that nightmare, infinitely more chaotic and contradictory, which is life.

France has recently passed through a military crisis and is now engaged in an economic crisis. But there is a third kind, which implacably follows the other two, and which is the most subtle and significant of all: the intellectual or spiritual crisis. Here, on the third crisis, the focus and strength of literature are felt. At the beginning of this essay, I referred to the example of Paul Valéry and his lecture, *La Crise de l'Esprit*, written at the close of the first World War. At that moment of depletion, France was able to turn to one of her literary minds in order to see more clearly into the problems facing her. Valéry belongs to no recognizable group of writers, such as Communists or Catholics or Existentialists. He is therefore, as Gide is, a more purely literary figure, disinterested and supremely independent.

His death coincided with the end of the war, and again, as in 1919, France turned toward him as clarifier of contradictions. The long creative effort of Valéry's life was directed toward a study of the activity of man's spirit or of man's mind. The word *esprit* in French means both spirit and mind, and surely it is one of the most frequently used words in Valéry's texts. In one of his earliest writings, published before the end of the 19th century, Valéry asked the question, "What are the powers of a man?" (*Que peut un homme?*) and on the pages he was writing at the time of his death in 1945, he was asking the same question.

He never deviated from the most central problem of man, from a consideration of the deepest part of man's being, of what he called

le moi pur ("the pure self"). Valéry's enterprise of fifty years, twenty of which were spent in total literary silence — an admirable lesson of rigor and severity toward oneself — was an enterprise of denuding the intellect, of stripping off false notions and percepts and prejudices from the mind. The activity of the mind consists for Valéry of two parts: transformation and conservation. By these two activities the present and the past are harmonized.

This enterprise of a literary mind, which is spiritual in its deepest sense, stimulates the demon of knowledge who always represents a grave danger for spiritual man, but Valéry pursued his adventure with an admirable French balance of wit and seriousness, of science and maliciousness, of incredulity and naiveté. There was always in him a trace of the young student's mind: brilliant and supple, affectionate and destructive. He liked to demolish traditions and then walk about joyfully in the débris. He used to call the devil "a very attractive literary character." But levity was always offset by seriousness. Valéry composed out of the problem of knowledge a work in prose and a work in poetry where light is juxtaposed with nocturnal shadows. The experience of being human for Valéry is, in its spiritual sense, equivalent to feeling that "there is something from all men in each one of us and something from each one of us in all men." (*Il y a de tous dans chacun et de chacun dans tous.*)

The most constant theme in the writings of Valéry he learned from the example and the method of Leonardo. It is a theme which, more than other literary themes, defines and limits the work of the artist and emphasizes the primacy of the spirit in the activity of the artist. An artistic work, according to this doctrine, is never terminated. It is abandoned. A poem or a painting, therefore, represents a fragment of some greater exercise or adventure carried on not within the realm of matter but within the realm of the spirit.

R. V. CASSILL:

Fragments for Reference

Lust and forgetfulness have been among us . . .

Formulas of Birth

To be born is no different than they say it is, only this time it's you.

The prints your fingers make. They say nobody else has that pattern or if they had there wouldn't be that scar across the second finger (which the barbed wire tore one December day when you were hunting). There wouldn't be that lead-colored sky and the white flakes that drifted over the stubble. There wouldn't be the fence creaking and springing out from under your boot. There wouldn't be that day.

Repeatedly spring delivers you in the same harsh way it delivers buds or the first grass. Time after time you have to find out how cold the glitter of mud in March is.

The repetitive process, when you are young, keeps bearing you into a world that has centers and no edges (remember the embarrassments of childhood, your hand lifted expectantly to the center of the loaded tree, the laughter of the adults. Or watching your own fat belly. Thinking how sweet it is.) and if

you make it, to be born again old is to live with the edges. The days gone, the nights gone, the land of memory where the edge-eaters live.

The shape of a birth can be cut out of the muckiest stuff. When the months of the war of nerves are run through, the border is crossed, the pretense of decency and the scruples are cut, the loyalty forsworn, the red, loving past surely behind you. And damn them then. You're your own little man. No blood pumps into you that's not your own. After nine months waiting you need neither cord nor the shape of the sack to hold you. You can remember from that pre-world the voices of a dreaming order telling you (you not-yet child) that Lincoln freed the slaves and loved his mother, that Washington didn't lie, that boiling in oil took place in olden times, that Columbus discovered a New World (you thought the sails swelled out on big sweet winds blowing into the future), that Daniel Boone found a country that shone as green as green moss in the snow.

How, Being Born, to Get What You Want

Listen to the big boys, the boys who've been around. They'll tell you it's sure fire. Just reach out, they'll say. There, there it is. Take it.

If your eyes are as sharp as your teeth are, remember this bit of the sharpie's remark, "I'd like to sink my long yellow teeth into that and let it drag me to death."

If your heart has to be as stubborn as an iron lock, remember hearing, "I have his picture yet. It isn't a very good picture. Sometimes I go to the places we used to go. There isn't anybody I know there. But — I don't know how to tell you — I don't forget him."

Or

"It doesn't matter what she does or anything. We were happy for a while and I know she'll never be that happy again."

(In the middle of summer, this one Sunday, I felt the Dakota wind run over my body like warm water in a current. After dinner we had had a fight with corn cobs in the barnyard, and when we were all worn out, we lay on top of a shed in the sun. The little girls came walking by in a row abreast, five of them holding hands. When they saw us up there watching them, the lot of them wavered like a five-leaved vine that swings loose from a wall in a light breeze. My cousin Walter yelled at them, and they began to giggle and shiver. They muttered and mumbled then all at once gave a laughing screech and turned and ran. A little cloud of dust followed each one, a delicate cloud floating off through the pasture fence.)

Once we fished a garter snake out of the cistern. Walter fastened a wire snare on the end of a pole to catch it. Four of us crouched around with our heads down in the water-smelling dark hole. We saw our faces reflected around the reflection of the clouds up behind us. The snake swam about slowly and aimlessly as though he did not mean to notice the wire slide under his belly and draw tight. A little afraid of him, we tramped and kicked him until his green hide broke and the red of him was smeared with dirt.)

(I rode one night in a coal car down across the Utah desert and when the sun came up like steel on fire, the little man with me took some bread and onions out of his shirt and we ate them. "Wunt you rather eat out like this than in some damn restrunt?" he said.)

In public parks there are shady spots where you can lie and watch the girls strutting around the pool, watch their tense bodies balancing when they go up to dive; or if you haven't anywhere else to remember the old men with cheesy eyelids in the libraries, behind piles of

books, the white-skinned hands busy on letters to the editor. The words that go on the page bitter and young, "My dear sir: The presumptions of your ignorance . . ." The minds hunting like a hawk hunting over a grassy field.

(We marched in toward the hills that afternoon, coming to the edge of them, filing in among the boulders just before dark. When we sat down for ten, I saw Martin leaning back on a rock just to my right. There was brown dust all over his face except where the sweat had run down through it. "My feet," he said, "they're throbbing like a mocking bird's ass." The taste of water washing the sand out of my mouth. I remember the flocks of sparrows sweeping over while we made our camp. In the gray light.)

Or How to Evade Reality

Reach for clouds, roads, sky, apples; imagine arms which are strong enough to hold anything that time wants. Reach your hand out of a train window into the dark, and if your hand touches a hand out there (it will seem real) get off the train and look and look and look for whom you touched.

There should be caves in reality. There should be a thicket. There should be a station along the way. Sure, Jack. But come on. Hurry.

(In the fall evenings, above the oak trees big V's of geese came over. If I pointed a stick at them, or the handlebars of a junked bicycle, they were formations of enemy aircraft. And over the mountains, when the light remained only in the top of the sky, the bombers with the orange color of the sun streaked on them were geese following an old river. The *American Boy* and *The Wonder of the War in the Air*, which had led me by the hand through imagination to the season of reality, could not lead me back.

The hills rising up sharply out of the desert at Kasserine reminded me of the river hills I'd once imagined full of battles — and seen lighting as artillery fire a long way off.)

To lie in summer looking up the trunk of a box elder tree, to watch the leaves open a soft door and to see the deep sky through it isn't

the same thing as the New Empire Hotel (walk up one flight and register as Mr. and Mrs. Jack Chance from Reno, Nevada — the clerk is an old acquaintance of the Chances) nor the cold awakening and the return down a street crackling with rain.

And finding at the edge of your own town an old house with the

roof fallen in and draped over the walls as softly as wet burlap, newspapers stacked in its cellar telling of the inauguration of Grover Cleveland, a coin and an old tin can on the damp stairway is not quite the same

as climbing into the house in the village, the one house that looks undamaged after the bombardment and seeing the black wall and the chairs scorched hastily with a flame-thrower and expecting to see the faces suddenly come back, the children reappearing at the door. When you tell yourself the faces of the dead won't hurt you if you don't see them. When you wonder if someone is just outside. Are there footsteps coming up the alley?

In the movie you see certain strangers (but their caps look familiar, their coats, too) walk through the Newsreel as though they had their minds on the blonde in the Main Feature until the planes come up the street behind them and they run for doorways and some of them fall, Jesus, you're safe and indignant all at the same time, and while the feature is on you don't have to think that if the blonde's real then safe isn't, or if safe is

the blonde isn't and isn't anybody you knew in high school and has never claimed to be

any particular friend of Jack's
who you aren't anyway.

(The causes of war are economic, you will learn. But what if I said maybe that's a dollar you're giving me and maybe it isn't a dollar and he let me bite it to see and I said maybe it's a dollar and maybe it won't ever be a dollar. Would his surprise be real?

Or if I took the dollar without question and in good faith and held it really there in my hand would Mrs. Chance with her best dress on, wagging her hips in just that way that makes you cry to watch it, come down the street and stop to say, "Hello Jack. You've been a long time gone"?)

How to Answer a Letter Read in a Bar in 1940

Begin at once to compose a reply. Make it exact and calm but fairly representative of your feelings. Say this is winter. The sun looks more like a reminder than a sun. The street outside is mostly covered with snow. In this bar there are no individual or separate shadows.

Refer to a parenthesis of her letter (when I come in the spring).

Pause for the necessary interruptions, or, rather, those you can

expect in so public a place. While the clock hand swings back and forth across five o'clock, seeking eternity, learn that the road to life leads back and forth past these epitaphs:

"I done every dirty thing you ever heard of, and I never got anything out of life either."

"I said, 'Don't tell your ma I give it to you, but here, take this money to buy the stuff for supper. Get us some nice boloney. I ain't no bum.'"

"He came home drunk and fell on the floor. His wife was pregnant and couldn't bend down to hit him. So she started kicking him."

"I wrecked his car for him and damn near killed him, and I wish it would of been me and done a good job."

"I wish to Christ they had just sewed up everything when they did that and left me open on only one end."

Resume: This place in winter is a concave monument. As for myself (what am I thinking these days?) I'll try to explain. I have imagined a mirror in which I am not yet walking. In it a figure appears burdened with talk. The talk concludes, "Maybe what I always figured, thinking I was someone special, that I could do anything I made up my mind to do, was that I'd be the American Lenin or something like that. Aaah. Boo. I've lied to myself for twenty years. Or is that true, even? Anyway, as long as I've known how to. But still, what I wanted to see you for . . . You're a writer, or you say you are, and I didn't want to do this unless everything about me, all this I've told you could be written down. I've made up my mind, but I can't get rid of the idea that my life ought to be understood. I don't think it's worth living, but maybe someday somebody will live better and it will do them good if they know about me. Just on paper it might look better than it feels. There's too many things that can be done to you while you're really alive. Your nerves are too near the skin. Think about all the clubs and whips and fire they apply to these guys in these skillful, persistent ways. And I'm as happy now as I'll ever be, so why stretch it out? Only you write it all down, everything I've told you, because just in that one way I don't want to ever die."

The imagined figure points forefinger to forehead and pretends to snap the thumb down like a gun hammer. The figure falls half out of the mirror. People I know gather before the mirror and look at the sideless head. Their voices explain that this was I. The things that persist of him, like ghosts in their minds, are the realities of my life, stripped from me and given to this one.

If I resist this robbery, other figures appear in the mirror — soldiers and partisans — and describing voices give them my realities. They die by millions and pass out of the mirror wearing my guises. I keep the breathing of my own life, but it too becomes caught in that mirror as in childhood we are caught in a constricting dream. You know, the dream in which tigers leap and the finger can not pull the trigger in defense.

Conclude: I have read your letter over and over. All you say is Wait. You will come in the spring. I cannot understand this, this attitude. I believe this winter is real. It will never be over just because this spring you talk about comes.

In the World You Meet the Stubborn Ones

There was the story about her, never becoming quite clear, that she had been in love once with a fellow who moved out West and never wrote back to her. Whatever it was, when she married she wasn't happy, and the children she bore did not make up for what she thought she had once seen in the world. She was always planting flowers and kept the house full of potted plants all winter. In 1927 she joined the small town's branch of the foreign missionary society. At night when she thought about it, lying awake, she told herself that the Good Lord did not intend his children in China to eat grass and mud. She could imagine then the taste of grass and mud, and it helped to believe she belonged to a society that was doing something to distribute God's Daily Bread. It helped her not to think about herself so much.

In the years when the Japanese planes flew unmolested over China and bombed unmolested, it seemed to her the bombs were destroying something very important to her, some vague imagined substance (not quite people) of her love. And it's easy to understand the devils in the planes when they blast the image you had felt secure within you. She did not ask whom she should hate.

She understood the war without the help of the columnists. It seemed very simple to her. On one side were the guns and those who owned them. On the other side she counted those whom she believed counted on her. When the war was over, she still understood those who still had guns.

And Those Who Die Young

He was nineteen when the war was over and had been knocking around the infantry camps in the States for a year. In the fall of 1945 he was sent to Japan. He arrived too late to see the Little Yellow Bastards, but he saw men and boys still walking the cold streets in the remnants of uniform, and the women with bony, expressionless faces, with children slung on their backs, kneeling gracefully before an overturned garbage can from which they took egg shells and sucked them.

He made a sight-seeing trip to Nagasaki and wrote a letter home saying, "It doesn't look any different from the other cities they bombed. It's only when you think that it all happened at once and more people were as a result of this killed that it seems different." He didn't know what to think of the Jap who told him, "It's a good thing you have bombed our cities. Now we can rebuild them with wider streets." It didn't seem quite right to say that.

He had no regular job in the outfit and one day they sent him with another GI to Sasebo to pick up a freight-car load of beer. On the way back with the load the two of them went to sleep in the freight car. The cases of beer shifted, pinned them both down, but pinning his blanket tight across his face. He could still yell for a while, but the other man couldn't get free to help him. Before the train had passed through the tunnel into Honshu, he was dead.

And another one who didn't see the end of the war. He had the name of a famous general except that his middle initial was different. He was standing in front of a plane that had just come in when one of the 50's, for no reason, not quite cold yet, blew his head into a pulp full of bone splinters.

And the Others

He was Master Sergeant in the Headquarters Company at the time they landed on Bougainville. One night after supper — they had just come back from the mess tent near the beach, he said — while they were shooting the breeze a Jap came running out of the palm trees. The little rat must of been out of his head, like, because's just running up to us screeching Kill me, kill me. And there was a Thompson slung right inside the tent where he could reach it easy. "O.K.," he said. "O.K." Damn near cut him in two.

They shoot a 45 slug, don't they — a Thompson?

Approach the Present

The world is always turning into now. In childhood now whips by with a whistle like a green switch in the air.

Then it slows down and as things end the ends get fuzzier and slower. The last end is a pile of *thé* unraveled, fit for cobwebs which might as well be public property if they were property.

(When Roger came to play with my brother they hauled sand in toy dump trucks, but I wasn't old enough to play with them. I tried to kick over their trucks. They took me down, poured sand over my face, and ran away. I waited behind the front door with a club and hit them both when they came back. I made them cry and got whipped for it. When I was sent to bed, I knew I'd done wrong. Giant frogs and yellow lights from hell threatened me.)

"Never, never. Not until you're grown up."

When you're grown up some there is another voice,

"Full many a rose is born to blush . . ." the fat-rimmed eyes crinkling in amusement, "How does that go, the rest of it? Anyway, I'm sorry there's nothing we can do for you." I got what I wanted but so late I'd forgotten why

I wanted it. "No sir. I don't imagine and I didn't expect."

A parenthesis of words—the first end and the second end: "Darling, let's watch ourselves so nothing don't happen." and "Hello, I thought I recognized you when you came in, but . . ."

As a parenthesis for:

Her arms around your neck while somebody else's radio is saying (on a fine warm night) "Reichschancellor Hitler has ordered his legions to meet force with force."

We had a twelve-day passage on the troopship coming back. In our cabin nobody talked much but one Lieutenant Smith. He'd been with an outfit of niggers — "more ——— trouble, but me and the old man fixed their ——— wagon." "You hear the news? They want to send food to them ——— in Europe." "One officer we had was smart in books, but he didn't know a ——— thing about the army. The mens, they called themselves the mens, were asking me about him, and the old man and me snuck down to see if we could catch him at it, but it turned out there was nothing to it." "These ——— Jews. Aren't any of you Jews, are you?" "By God, if I was commanding general there wouldn't be no mass meetings." "I'd take the ——— atom bomb over there and clean them all up." In twelve days we learned

he hated niggers, foreigners, politicians, enlisted men, Jews, women. Andrews said he was a radical, but nobody told him to shut up.

But Don't Worry

Stop the subscription, sell the radio, pull the blind on the window facing the street. Come and kiss and let's get acquainted. How can the world end twice when it's always ending?

Contemporary Metaphors of Birth

Toward the day and the hour, when the divisions were bulging the border and the ships lay fat with troops (while the last pretense was asking, "Do you want me? Do you need me for anything, sir?") the blood-stream thoughts split as the eyes became aware of light. The ships opened and the border broke.

When the period swelled through its last month, the only questions left were: How can we cling? How can we hide in this sweet dark?

The red expulsion into the new, new world. Through the mirrors of the rosy walls. The reflection of our frightened eyes no longer sheltering around us.

Review the Workable Formulas

In the Blood. In blood.

In concocted faith or hope that needs no object — waking on a train when the morning whistles cry out a new city, climbing ladders of a ship to see the newest harbor, sitting in a house when a new voice speaks — it may happen to you,

Or the tyranny of those who become as little children.

ARTHUR GREGOR:

Of Caligula, Bach and the Seascape

The sky and
the blue seascape
and the waves in
normal upsurge
shaped as the boats
in Hat-shepsut's time
by no mere coincidence

bearing the Queen's
gold and carpets
down the sometimes
quiet waters where
later Caligula said
to Neptune

I am the God

and scores drowned
complete with armor
and wine jugs

and the roaring of
the waters was deeper
than the idiot's laughter
blackier than cuttlefish
hit by spear

The sky and
the blue debris
in the blue-white foam
and the seascape blue
when it is calm

the waves and a white
convoy,
swan for more
than mere convenience

is what we have
without question

The sky and
the seascape and
the swan out in the sea
not too far never too close
bearing theory, ideal,
the silver prince of peace

he who will not strip
to suntan beside us
will not ever

as the blue blue
seascape will never
rush sh sh
against our fingers

but who will ever in
the fold of wings of swans
exist as a Bach Chorale exists

bravura
bravura
in us

The sky and
it is blue in the forum
of scattered salvages,

bone, horn, jade monkeys
that sailors kept,
the blue of soothsayers
and a sterile hand

Tiberius at Capri

we know of leopards and
the feasts of German guards

and the waves and
the swan or a white
basilica

a heritage quite complicated
quite without question

The sky and
the blue seascape
and the horn, the searose

the idiot's laughter,
the prince and
the chorale

the blue debris and
the very small clouds

purple when the coasts
where the lotus grows
turn to the sun

JAMES MERRILL:

The Forms of Death

I

Lo! on the shore the swimmer lies unfurled:
 His lips for learning syllables of the tide
 Are locked, and loose about him the sea's world
 Useless and listless, a suicide's empty vial;
 His salted fingers ride
 Those shimmering margins between
 The sense and sensuality of sea-ruin;
 Water that rocked him, racked him a furious while
 Is flattened now to a less fatal green
 As, blinking, the pools subside
 To leave him splayed in the noon
 Like any dried medusa. Let him appear
 A coral incident only, an agony
 To smile upon, or put his mouth to your ear
 And marvel at the vocables of the sea.

II

The marble eye will never close, but who
 Would mourn it more than yours? that opal tunnel
 Into the brain, the maelstrom of that gaze
 Sucking all beauty down to a shocking death,
 Transforming pain into
 Pain's radiant ghost until
 There is no guiltless flowering of the earth
 Safe from the vengeance of that gorgeous torment,
 That magnet wrenching the needle from clear north,
 Turmoil of vision bent
 Against its own intent:
 This your young eye, most martyred murderer;
 And who shall say that by a crueller scourge,
 By the moon's explosion, earthquake, fiery rain,
 Old age or mockery, the world were better slain?

III

The real death is never dramatic. One night
 The heart embraces glass and dies, just so.
 Or on the sea, or in the poems we write,
 A shell falls into water — we watch it slowly
 Dwindle to absence — or from
 The poet's notebook a word
 Drifts past the nets of language and is gone
 And nothing is left but a brief crown of foam
 Or the spoiled page where lurching swans are drawn:
 Not blood, not burning, not
 The bewilderment of dying,
 But the essential death from which is built
 The gaiety fastened to the poet's eye
 Or on a gull's dried beak the happy salt
 Passing for pain beneath a bandaged sky.

IV

Only the satin lives, and you my mother
 Are featureless, your image overexposed:
 A photograph at the brilliant end of time.
 Shadows are feathered, but on your face my mother
 No gentle plumage is roused
 To do your meekness homage
 Or dim the white white countenance of your crime.
 Only the satin blazing where you sit
 Lives, being spiritless, knowing a death past damage,
 A death so exquisite
 That in your drawing-room
 Of gilt and feathery flowers there is no language
 To utter it before it fades, surpassed
 By the white epic of your face in the gloom
 Whose breakneck beauty finds its mask at last.

V

A woman while I slept stood by my bed
 And with a needle and gold thread began
 To stitch with gold each agony of my skin;
 Over my cheek, thin eyelid, willing thigh,

Beneath her jabbing thread
 Gold like a jaundice spread
 Until I changed into a tapestry,
 Until as the last great cities that will come
 I shone in a gold nonchalance of doom
 Beyond those violences
 Of lust that spoils and lust
 That seems to spare. Nightlong I lay, all gold;
 And since that night, in moving through the world
 Within its poignant needlework, my breath
 Halts like a gesture pedestaled in death.

The Diary of the Duc de L***

I

On such a day even the sun stops, even
 The leaves hang white as powdered eyelids, even
 The queen snores at her pale embroidery.
 I watch my hand as it writes. From England, news:
 My childhood love, Mme. de V, is dead.

Man of all parasites most excellent
 Clings to the world as on a flower's leaf
 An insect that devours the tenderest fringes
 Is flicked with a grimace off and trodden quite
 By the red heel of an aging botanist.

So she is dead, lips yellowed, hair in lockets,
 Hands folded like the dusty wings of a moth.
 I am unmoved; and shall in a moment rise
 To greet the young ambassador from the East
 Who with what daring flits to our dry court . . .

An hour in D's abundant greenhouses
 Where a new orchid blooms amid moist glass;
 After eight years of stress in a mild air
 Is now to his ravenous shears accessible
 The plant of paradise — his name for it.

II

The king stroked velvet as though it had been his youth
 And called at random for lutes, forks and Chartreuse.
 His Majesty, the court historian wrote,
 This tenth of August holds no audience
 Save with indispositions of the heart.
 Morning intruded; one had an obligation
 To be like the sun which signed its name on streets,
 On men, as on important documents.
 But the king scowled at so discreet a counsel
 As to how all things most reasonably might be seen.

And how the prince cavorted at his knees!
 And how the child musicians' fingers smarted!
 But the king's desire sat by an upper window
 Turning the pages of *Les Très Riches Heures*
 Thinking of time and smiling at her thoughts.

How senseless, then, that she would take no ring
 And that the king, while a whole kingdom languished,
 Shuttered the windows? No, the court poet said,
 Reason's a dynasty at whose emblazoned pall
 The young pretender love cries interval.

III

This night after the opera we walked
 Where marigolds, obedient populace,
 By day lend flame to the fountains but at night
 Are caught up wholly in a quenching dark.
 There were stars and, elsewhere, fireworks; and we went

Until we heard inside the summerhouse
 The ancient princess at her spinet playing
 And talking to herself when the music stopped.
 What music fleshless as a theorem
 And what mad voice — voice wise yet stammering,

The voice, almost, of youth yet never pure,
 As though the river of the tongue were clogged

By an upheaval of the intellect:
Of one disaster the most ruined diction —
A voice, I must confess, a horrible voice.

It seemed, for an instant, we had ceased to be
Except as basins brimming with that speech.
But she who was with me touched my sleeve and brought
Me back to the boxwood and the marigolds,
Stars and wet fountains, back to her laugh and the world.

FREDERICK NIES:

The Persistence of Caruso

Eerie buoy for one hued as the quick —
this cicad gut and worn oompah
you body upon
out of the gauze mouth, Nadir,
at the hour of the pearl-gathering.

Knees line out glows of sand,
patiently the blade pares turquoise: shark
god for whom the virgin is swathed.
Veiled great eyes . . . a word soft, too, as leather —
and they cannot quite deform your pang,
these earliest grooves, you remembering her
who from temple palms sang your heart useless.

Wherefore the jockey keeps feeding us you
permuted by arias, anniversaries, tenors, who sang this?
Now: vocations — between the Nürnberg tacker and John Henry —
Diver, reefward of the grassed
volcano, who in Ceylon
retrieve the air-glass chimings and a temple girl's breath.

How the condors of the dollar-ten sierras miss you:
nut sized heads that bumped gilt at your bravo.
They shall have fine tenors —

not to kill tubes at four paces
 not the firepink in the mist
 the brush of whose nevermore is no electric eel —
 but fine tenors
 lifting a clean yestermoon out of the Bay of Bengal.

Whom then, your kin excepted, do we most condole?

Ochone for the man in the rooming house next,
 irascible old sleeper who never heard you, Enrico,
 and certainly never wished to.
 Coronach him for yelling just now at an off-tune drunk,
 "Hey, Caruso! Bottle it for Christ's sake."

"Who nahell is Caruso?"

Ochone for the old man bereft of bola;
 no Melchior, hey Sinatra hey anybody would
 do. There was no ganglion like Dempsey,
 like hey Caruso.

Carked for one lessened, one
 needing you always and ever virgin of tympanum toward you,
 I twirled you high . . . my window was open.

From the ruddy gauze, go shark-darer for nacre
 (so irradiant a gloaming ease your time shard)
 go in a twill of convection arrows
 out into the drunk's caesura:
Je crois vous entendre encore.

You mantle the dead orchestra and you,
 the hot slow quickening molten run,
 mound keepsake peaks above the nebula

"Hey you got no home Caruso?
 Bottle it f'jeeziz; go peddle it to the Met!"

Ullalulla for who has most lost you;
 for him you crutched,
 a piece of whose heart has joined you.
 Halloo, vox imperiosissima, atque goombye
 old mole, go home and sleep it off.

JENE LYON:

Song of Simplicity: Entr'acte

Fill the windows with bright green crosses.
 Fill all the windows with crossed bologna sticks
 and tie a dead tomcat to the funeral hearse.
 Hang on the wall a mask of red embers
 and let the mare in to pick at the curtains.
 On the grave of the dead
 wreath a spangle of cymbals and sing
 at your will the litany of Sécaire.
 Confess to a tree stump
 your innermost passion . . .
 the desire to lie on a witch willow limb
 is a common desire.
 Drink from the skull of a maiden long buried
 the wine and the dregs from mouldy kegs.
 And the incense of dung
 burn still in the evening
 until the evening is quite overcome
 by the incense of dung.
 Butter your toast with the bone of a nightingale
 and you may sing like a crow in the morning.

A Few Dull Words

A few dull words,
 Time blunted, or by the remorseless winds
 Out of forever dulled,
 Thence erupted with mine own seal upon them.
You star-sparkling gems, you fire-bright jewels!

Here's the cud of it,
 My sharp-toothed father.

Pull the glistening dagger,
 Bloodwet and dripping from my heart.
 It is a cheap trick — the handle's hollow
 And the blade sinks into it.
 I might have had a hat-pin, thin, round and sharp,
 Plunged through the eye,
 Probing the glairy brain.

Or walking with intent down
 Main Street with the town
 Strewn in some abandon on both its sides —
 Walking down this street
 And meeting face to face
 Some dull word you had spoken
 Once in the rain or
 Once no matter where:
 Should I nod my acknowledgment —
 Good evening, Good evening. Good evening.
 Good evening, you!

Jagged glass on a one-way path.
 Sparkled in the sun.
 Sharp. That's sharp.

Oh, he's a shrewd un, he is.
 Or she is. But not me.
 Slow, dull, blunt-witted,
 Not a lick-a-sense. Being time-consumed
 And by the remorseless winds
 Out of forever dulled.

Hand up the body, Jene Boy.
 Time is wasted. (I wasted her
 And now doth she waste me.)

REGINALD L. COOK:

Big Medicine in 'Moby Dick'

"There is magic in it." So Ishmael, solitary survivor of The Pequod's disastrous voyage in pursuit of the White Whale, discovers in the meditation of water. So Melville discloses in *Moby Dick*, his mythopoeic tale of the golden days of the whale fishery. For some readers the magic is in the symbolism and philosophy; for a few it is in the strange wonders of cetological information; for many others it is in the spirited yarn, narrated in a sonorous, eloquent rhetoric, compounded of fun and fury.

Above all else, *Moby Dick* is a briny book. As soon as the land's behind, there is the feel of the ground-swell beneath stretched timbers, the curl of foam at the bows, the gurgle at the stern, ropeyards tingling, tall masts buckling, bowsprit plunging, and, for companions, nimble seamen who trim the yards, veteran harpooners who skilfully dart the barbed iron, and mates who have many times thrust the lance in the wide and endless waters from one side of the world to the other — tough, weather-ruddied, brawny hunters of whales with a windward look in their eyes. There is sea magic in the book — the yo-heave-o spirit of spreading sail on extended yards and halyards hard-strained through creaking blocks.

There is also a natural magic in the object of the chase — in the sperm whale with its immense head and comparatively small eye, its incredible power and remarkable propulsion. Who, among the whaling mariners, did not marvel at the breaching whale, rising vertically out of the water with such velocity that half its length is bared, or gaze in wonder at the whale suspended perpendicularly in the water, head downward, in the interesting motion known as peaking flukes! "Excepting the sublime breach . . . this peaking of the whale's flukes is perhaps the grandest sight to be seen in all animated nature." Melville surely speaks for himself when he says in *Moby Dick*: "Standing at the mast-head of my ship during a sunrise that crimsoned sky and sea, I once saw a large herd of whales in the east, all heading toward the sun, and for a moment vibrating in concert with peaked flukes. As it seemed to me at the time, such a grand embodiment of the gods was never beheld, even in Persia, the home of the fire-worshippers."

The whale's deep-diving—about two thousand feet—and its spouting are of the same order of natural magic. So also is its voracious appetite (to us), when we learn that the blue whale devours at one feeding the equivalent of six barrels of large shrimplike crustaceans, called "krill," while the sperm whale feeds on cuttlefish, especially the giant squid. Moreover, Melville is quite as fascinated by its breeding habits, for doubtless he saw whales mating in tropical waters during the fall and winter, and doubtless he saw them following the veins in migrations, moving poleward to spend the summer in Arctic or Antarctic waters.

There is to-day another kind of magic beyond the scope of *Moby Dick*. It is the magic of mechanical enterprise where the big whaling vessels of Great Britain, Norway, Japan and Holland hunt in the Indian Ocean or off the coast of Peru or in the Antarctic, completely equipped with mechanical gadgets that an inventive age has provided. Among the super-gadgets are planes, Asdic (sonic submarine detectors), radar and guns. Planes sight the whales; gunners follow the sounding whale on its dive by Asdic sonic beam; and radar spots the surfaced whale. The whaling guns, so important in making the kill, and efficiently unromantic, fire modern harpoons equipped with bombs that explode after contact. This is a "magic" that out-magics the skill that lent such splendor to "that wild Scandinavian vocation" of whaling in the golden age.

"I love all men who dive," Melville wrote Evert Duyckinck. He is himself a "thought-diver." It is not alone the whale who dives deep, sounding a thousand fathoms, as it is said, beneath light and air. In *Moby Dick* Melville dives deep and comes up with blood-shot eyes. It is the magic in this deep-diving that now interests us.

In *The Golden Bough* religion is represented as a belief in a conscious and personal power which controls and directs the course of nature and human life, and the practice of conciliating the higher power. Magic, on the contrary, assumes an order and uniformity in nature which is determined by immutable laws whose operation is foreseeable and calculable. While religion believes that through persuasion it is possible to induce the superhuman force that controls the universe to favor mankind, magic applies coercion. The magician arrogates more power than the religious devotee. He assumes that by spells, enchantments and ceremonies he can manipulate the impersonal force which controls all things. In the magician's arrogant authority the humble religious devotee sees "an impious and blasphemous usurpation of prerogatives that belong to God alone."

To the medicine man of primitive cults there were no elements of chance, caprice or accident in the course of nature. By following the laws of nature, as he understood them, the medicine man believed that he would be rewarded by success. When he failed to conform strictly to the rules of his art, his spell would be broken. Thus his power was not arbitrary and unlimited. Neither does Ahab assume that he is on the inside. He is not Supreme Dictator of the Universe although he gives the prescription for such a dictator. *Moby Dick* would have been far less credible had Melville endowed Ahab with superhuman power.

There is magic in *Moby Dick*. It is the magic of Ahab whose intent dictates the form and spirit of his quest. The ungodly Ahab is bent upon supernatural revenge. He forswears the Christian God of his fathers and celebrates a blasphemous ritual. In an ascendancy of egotistic will he vents his contempt on "ye great gods." "I laugh and hoot at ye, ye cricket-players, ye pugilists . . . come forth from behind your cotton bags! Come, Ahab's compliments to ye; come and see if ye can swerve me." No suppliance here! No placative humility! Instead, the arrogance of the sorcerer who believes he can coerce the great gods. Yet Ahab proves to be mindful of the orthodox God when, on the eve of the final mortal encounter, he inquires: "Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does that living, and not I."

There is a subtle consciousness in Ahab. He operates on two levels: sometimes on the Christian; more frequently on the primitive. Yet his ceremonial rituals are not aimed to influence either deity or devil. He hardly respects the power of either of them. He uses them only that the appropriate spells will inevitably produce the desired effect on his crew. There is no evidence that he believes in their efficacy in giving him ultimate power over *Moby Dick*, but they influence his men, and this is necessary to gain his bloody-minded end.

Ahab's magic does not follow the usual pattern of the primitive magician. He did not seek for supernatural power in a dream or vision, to be effected by fasting, stimulants or flagellant torture, as among the Plains Indian tribes of Western America, the African tribal groups, or the Melanesians. He does dream prophetically and fatefully of the hearses, and he prophesies that he will dismember his dismemberers, which subsequent events prove to be an erroneous prophesy. After

the first fateful meeting with the White Whale at sea, he envisions his own greatness dramatically by exalting the egotistic will until his malaise is that of a megalomaniac paranoid. His behavior becomes strange and psychotic. He casts away his pipe, to be rid of serenity. He commands his men with overbearing looks and exaggerated actions. Yet there is comparatively little sadism and no masochism in his actions.

Ahab's reversion is important. It is linked with his personal misfortune. In the Christian world of rewards and punishments, salvation by faith, and the conciliation of powers superior to man, he is angered and puzzled by his personal fate. He is crazed by a loss which most mariners would accept as a vocational hazard. The aberrant Ahab is no ordinary mariner. In *The Quarter Deck* he states a personal quandary. Is the force which governs the world conscious or unconscious of human destiny? The orthodox mariner believes in a superhuman power that is conscious and personal. He considers deity susceptible to the insinuation of prayer and sacrifice. Ahab, victimized by an unreckoned force, asks: Is there an accountable God? He is aware of an invisible power, but he is unsure whether there is any intelligible meaning behind the inscrutable universe. All he knows is that the White Whale who has reaped his leg from his body is "outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it." This is what he will wreak his hate upon; this is the object of his fiery hunt. Seeing no particular efficacy in Christian conciliation of a force that permits evil to prevail, Ahab rejects the Christian way and turns by reversion to the forms of magic — "big medicine".

To solemnize the chase of the white-headed whale he calls for a heavily charged flagon of liquor "hot as Satan's hoof" and passes it round, rallying his men to take short draughts and long swallows. He orders his harpooners to detach the iron part of their harpoons and use them as goblets. He fills these ingenious goblets to the brim and ranking the mates opposite the harpooners, he focusses the fiery chase on Moby Dick until the White Whale spouts black blood and rolls fin out. In this exuberant ceremonial he unites the crew in an indissoluble league. "Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!"

Another example of "big medicine" is shown when Ahab's talismanic lance is forged. Its shank is made of rods from nail-stubs gathered from the steel shoes of racing horses welded together "like glue from the melted bones of murderers." The barbs were forged of Ahab's razors, sharp as "the needle-sleet of the Icy Sea", and tempered

in the blood of the three heathen harpooners, initiates in the harpoon cult, aboard the Pequod. In the baptismal tempering of the barbs, Ahab utters a blasphemous incantation: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!"

The most sensational display of big medicine occurs when the typhoon lashes the Pequod. Ahab rises to tremendous height arrogating elemental power. It is a powerful magic that he exhibits, confounding some but not all of his men. At the base of the main-mast he holds aloft the lightning link in his left hand, placing his foot on the kneeling Parsee, and defyingly invokes the "clear spirit of clear fire" before the awed crew (although later Stubb disabuses the credulous Flask as to the actual risk in Ahab's seemingly dangerous act). The panic-stricken crew race to the braces to fix sail and turn homeward in awful fright when they see flames of "pale, forked fire" shooting from the naked barb of Ahab's specially forged harpoon in the whale-boat's bow. Ahab snatches the harpoon, waves it torch-like and swears to transfix the first man who casts loose a rope's end. He revitalizes in the crew its oath to hunt the White Whale, "and with one blast of his breath he extinguished the flame," to the terror of many of the men.

It is his belief that the elements do not destroy him when he defies them because he is one with them. Their right worship is not love or reverence but defiance—"defyingly I worship them," he exclaims as he holds the lightning rods aloft at the height of the typhoon. Extraordinary he is, for so sensitized is his physical organism that he reacts preternaturally to changes in environment not perceptible to grosser seamen. It is Ahab who first smells the presence of the White Whale. He is like a hound on a watery slot.

Those who have not been cowed stand in awe of his acts. Even the prudent and unconvinced Starbuck is constrained to obey Ahab's commands, rebellingly. When the needles in the binnacle compass demagnetize in the storm, Ahab takes lance-head, top-maul and the smallest of the sail-maker's needles, and with "strange motions" he magnetizes the needle from the lance-head and slips the needle over the compass card. Scornfully and triumphantly he awes the men with this show of magic, proving at least to his satisfaction that he is "lord of the level load-stone." Ahab is possessed of irrepressible histrionic abilities. Like Twain's Connecticut Yankee what he does has to be theatrical or he doesn't take any interest in it.

The final chapters of *Moby Dick* are a thoroughly documented representation of the fanatical passion of Captain Ahab in his attempt to

infuse his will (through magic) upon his men and upon the elemental forces of the universe. And in a sense his magic is just as fundamental as its practice by the rudest aborigines of Australia or Africa. There are, we see, ceremonial rituals, the divinations of the Parsee and Ahab's dream, demonological connotations, harpoon cults, the masked god of the White Whale, the fetishistic death-lance, chant-like exclamations. In seventeenth century New England Ahab would be accused of wizardry and condemned as a sorcerer.

Aided by civilized qualities of intelligence and gifted with "high perception", Ahab knows how to appeal to the covetousness of his crew. He victimizes them with bribes and plies them with spirits, and effectively immobilizes them by strange ascendancies of megalomania through "sheer inveteracy of will." Ahab shows few gestures of mollification. He does lower for the chase when the White Whale is out of range, which tends to settle his men. He has studied the files of old log books and traced courses on large wrinkled yellowish sea-charts. He knows the set of tides and currents; he has calculated the driftings of the sperm whale's food; he has noted the tendency of the whale to swim in arbitrary veins; he will, therefore, hunt Moby Dick in particular latitudes and anticipate him in the Season-on-the-line.

Ahab's eventual defeat is attributable to a personal failure, not to the exaction of a lawful deity or higher power. After the second day of the chase, injured but unbeaten, he tells his first mate Starbuck, "I am the Fates' lieutenant, I act under orders." So he acted, for he thought the whole act was immutably decreed. He was ready; he asserted his desperate will; the immutable laws were acknowledged; the battle was joined; he fought heroically. Somewhere in between there was a slip. In perfect self-containment he finally addresses the whale. There is no trace of Christian submission or renunciation in his attitude. There is only the major chord of overweening pride and arrogance, so typical of primitive medicine men. "Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee."

His magic—the harpoon ritualistically forged, the crew shamanistically briefed, the contact vigilantly charted and planned—fail to destroy the force he opposes. Neither is the whale's attack unconditionally successful. In the mortal battle between the sentient Ahab and the inscrutable animate force incarnate in the White Whale, there is no clear-cut victory. If physical presence after mortal conflict is

the only just measure of victory then inscrutability rules supreme over vulnerable sentience. If the spirit of man has not been conquered, and this Ahab believes when he refers to the "unconquering" whale, then victory is partial and limited, not unconditional and absolute for the whale. Ahab is physically destroyed but spiritually triumphant over adversity *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Ahab's equivocal defeat is, in a sense, the failure of magic as an effective force in the manipulation of natural forces. *Moby Dick* is not an apotheosis of magic. By inference, it is a confession of the inadequacy of magic as a means of control. Ahab is brave and proud, but in his reversion to magic he confesses human ignorance and in his physical defeat he betrays, not lack of skill but the limitation of all men before superior animate forces. Ahab's fallibility is a token of the inadequacy of magic. The inscrutable remains inscrutable, but its presence is more exactly defined. We know it for what it is: a terrifying power at the heart of things. Ahab possesses no enchantment, personal or derivative, that gives him the potency to penetrate the ultimate nature of things. His pent-up passion, his cunning and patient preparation, his exacting toil, his brilliant ingenuity, his frenzied bravado, all avail him little, actually.

There is also considerable big medicine in *Moby Dick* indirectly associated with Captain Ahab. The tattooed Queequeg worships a little hunchbacked glistening black ivory god called Yojo with guttural pagan psalmody. The Manx-man is popularly invested with abnormal powers of discernment. The impromptu ritual enacted when the Christian Ishmael "marries" the pagan Queequeg — together smoking the tomahawk pipe, pressing foreheads in embrace, dividing personal wealth and offering burnt biscuit to Yojo with salaams, are certainly evidences of "medicine." So, too, is the appearance of Fedallah: the tall, swart, black-jacketed, white-turbaned, protuberant-toothed Parsee who raises the Spirit Spout and prophesies Ahab's fate. Nor can we exclude the tattooed body of Queequeg, a perfect marvel of totemism, representing "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth," as conceived by a prophet.

There are, moreover, correlative evidences of "medicine": Ahab's "brand", a cicatrice scoring him from head to toe, the result of his elemental strife at sea; his throne-like tripod of ivory bone on which he sits on the weather side of the deck; the vial of sand from Nantucket Soundings which Ahab carries with him like a fetish; and the

red-billed savage sea-hawk stealing his hat. There are the ambiguous rumors: of the veiled prophecy of the squaw Tistig from Gayhead, the shrouded story of Ahab's scrimmage with a Spaniard before the altar in Santa, and the hinted desecration when Ahab spat in the silver calabash. Are the latter actual or imaginary events? Are they meaningful as the soothsaying Elijah's gibberish? At least they are just such rumors as would surround the sorcerer and lend credence to his supernatural power. Melville mentions the tendency of superstitious whalemen to indulge their fancies and their credulity. "The whaleman," he says, "is wrapped by influences all tending to make his fancy pregnant with many a mighty birth." The wonders of the deep (the wondrous cistern in the whale's huge head, the prodigy of his unhinged lower jaw, and the miracle of his symmetrical tail on the fabulous squid); and the heroics of the chase (Queequeg's "agile obstetrics" in rescuing Tashtego from the sinking *Sperm Whale's* head or jolly Stubb's exuberant chase of great whales), contribute perceptibly to the atmosphere of "big medicine" in *Moby Dick*.

Animism is touched circumspectly in the White Whale, and totemism is suggested in the whale as masked god. There are the forms and usages aboard ship as related to the mariner's tribal society — the harpooner clan — but there is no reference to tabu, unless Captain Boomer's attitude and the insane Gabriel's injunction are considered as such. Nor is there any eroticism, though one terrific orgy of Dionysian revelry and drunkenness takes place. Nor is there any exorcism of devils.

Melville has dealt carefully with the necromantic features of big medicine. Extended as the mythopoeic scenes are, Melville does not over-reach himself. He resolves the issues in his book by having Ahab remain true to himself. The nefarious Ahab neither renounces the fiery hunt nor recants his reversion to demonology. His Christian apostasy is unimpugnable; to the end his sorcery is virtuous if ineffective. Melville's handling of "big medicine" is reservedly romantic. He does not offer a well worked-out formula that begins with the practice of obtaining supernatural power in dream or vision, to be effected by continence, discipline, torture, fasting, alcohol or drugs, nor one which applies the technique of concentration until the "right" vision comes. This was not, of course, his aim. The "big medicine" is used to heighten the drama and to infuse the magnificent plangent poetry with strange imagistic overtones. It does, however, contribute to the intellectual content. It reinforces Melville's meaning and in its connotations gives Ahab's actions powerful significance.

WILLIAM SANSON:

Displaced Persons

Have you watched Time eating at a place? The bearded jaws tearing unseen at the air of a still room, the stiller for so many silent people, the stiller for a drying-off of thought and of those motions of building that alone can compensate for the wolfish mouthfuls of living every minute hugely lost? The voracious bearded jaws, biting off the air, always up somewhere near the ceiling, between the frieze and the quiet electric cord?

The Indian House stood furnaced in melancholy red by a September sunset; such a light was brassy, spacious, and seemed to glow up from below, underlining thus the shadows and the tall empty windows of that immense Indian-built warehouse in such a way that a sense of desolation, of black-veiled sorrowers, of a Second Coming made a funeral of the Indian part, the brownish plastered facade of an already mournful London evening. But there were no black-bowed figures, no figures at all, the pillared and domed warehouse stood irrevocably empty, consumed within by its own void and on the outside, reflecting on mogulish plaster screens and friezes, by the far-away funeral red. Such a dead design was of course accentuated by the business in its forecourt, where there were piled and strewn huge chunks of grey granite and rough white marble, material for the grinding of tombstones. Strange wooden hoisting devices stood about, lashed and poised, like derelict siege catapults. But the tombstone industry was silent, it was past six o'clock, the only movement was to be sensed across the road, across the tramlines and under the overhead wires, where the doors of the Admiral's Discretion stood open.

Inside, in the wan electric light, between walls of faded orange, they were drinking. Little noise: they talked, worriedly, in whispers, leaning slightly towards each other. When the bell of the cash-till rang, one of them started, looked up for a moment bewildered; he shook his head and then, as though there was nothing else to be done, slowly as though the whole world and the rest of time were empty and could provide no further move, slowly the hand reached to his waistcoat pocket and from there drew out a small silvery machine. With this, without looking, sinking back, he rolled a cigarette. He had the

face of a pale pike, grey all over and greyer where the stubble grew; on his head was pulled down hard a fawn-coloured homburg with a greased silk brim.

This man was sitting in that untidy corner improvised by the door bolted open. Along from him, on the same polished pine bench perforated by so many holes, a small straight-necked woman in navy-blue serge sat alone; her hair jet-black, her cheeks flushed with rouge, the very white skin at the back of her neck grained with black ticks where she had been shaved for her shingle, her eyes hardly visible under the felt of a pale blue hat. She was looking at a picture hanging on the wall above, a military scene framed in fumed oak. When this woman with the straight neck and the blinding hat looked up, her whole body had to swing back so that she could see at all. Now, at such a tortured angle, she watched a grey Cardigan charging his Light Brigade into the fly-blown Russian cannon at Balaclava. After a while, a long while, as the electric clock pounced on, as the September sunset through the frosted glass burned darker, as the beer slowly sank in the glasses all around, as this beer then tasted round the teeth and the plates of those mouths and sank again to wash pooling behind waistcoats and the grimed elastic of corsets—after a while, the woman pursed her lips, swung herself vertical, took a peck at the stout-glass, and then with a slight brown froth on her upper lip re-elevated herself towards Cardigan. She remained in this position, strained; but more as if she were waiting for something to happen there in the bar than for Cardigan to make a move.

Indeed this same sensation of waiting hung over all those others who stood singly or in groups round the semi-circular bar. They all faced inwards, as though the expected and long-awaited happening might only occur at the pivot of their yellow pine semicircle, the central point where the cast-metal cash-till stood beneath its awning of draped Union Jacks and cards into which were stitched little bottles of aspirin tablets. To either side of the till stood and leant the two bar-tenders, sallow women of uncertain age, one spectacled and frizz-haired, the other taller and sleeker and provided with a jaw so enormous that it was weak—but both pale and slightly moist of skin. They also were waiting. Leaning with their backs to the bottles they stared vacantly just above the heads of the people who circled them. When one or other of the drinkers motioned for his glass to be refilled, one of these attendants would walk over the intervening space—and what a fine, round space, with the drinkers hemmed so close against their pale

wood railing! —and inquire the nature of the request still with her eyes raised just so slightly above the drinker's head. And these drinkers would receive their new glasses mournfully and remain staring inwards towards the till.

But some talked. There was a naval captain accompanied by two ladies and an elderly man wearing a cap, a stiff white collar and a tweed coat. This elderly man carried the rough walking stick of the retired. And the ladies! One had dyed her hair blonde, so that from behind she looked quite like a young girl; but that the bobbed hair hung straggled over a neck that shrunk away from it—and, of course, when she turned her head, one saw the face of disaster, painted in bright American colours, lifted, stitched up, the new-born virgin of fifty with thin fallen-in lips and every line pouched to a fever-pitch of anxiety: anxiety, but for the eyes, pale, filmed, popping out but not caring. Her sister wore the unmistakable marks of the tropics, the ancient tan, the melancholy wasted skin and the iron-grey hair, the seedy sportswoman and bridge-queen into whose attire there always crept the touch of silk that once had brought an hauteur to the far-flung club of stranded values where, for so many long and now finished years, her honeymoon had slowly set. The naval captain had eyes with a furtive, trustless twinkle. He stood drowned in a dark naval rain-coat. The four of them drank long water whiskies—and often nodded. Yet, however much they nodded, however many times they reasserted the rightness of the world, they too seemed to be waiting: the woman with the blonde hair often looked up at that pouncing clock, the elderly gentleman coughed and turned away and turned back again, the naval captain and his sportswoman stood opposite each other and jigged from toe to heel, like automatic toys, without ever stopping.

Two white-faced boys then lurched in, giggling. But when they faced up to the bar, the realization of some manly inheritance turned their cheeks suddenly red, as though a neon gas was momentarily infused into them, and then as quickly the new colour faded, so that their faces were white again, faintly greyed with oil—and they ordered ginger beer and bowed their heads over a black bicycle bell. Youth was to have its watery fling! Two others, older, idler, with strapping padded shoulders and about them a sprinkling of brassy gold, on their fingers, their ties, in their teeth—these two with their flat pints leant eagerly over the little balls in the pin-table machine. Eager, and thin-lipped. But between such feverish pulls and pokes at the machine, these two also lounged back and looked up at the clock, at the door,

at the fading light; they were waiting, like the others, for the something that would never happen.

But, surprisingly, it did. Suddenly into this hushed air, with its whispers, its shufflings of feet, its dead chinking, and above all and over everything its pervading, soundless whirring of the small yellow electric light bulb, that constant thing, unshaded, throwing its wan unmoving light straight at the top corners where the ceiling met those orange walls — now into this hush there broke a sudden huge sound. It exploded in from the street, with no warning — the deafening metal burst of a barrel organ.

What happened then was ubiquitous, the same small movement jerked all that drinking room, all the faces of the drinkers — each face moved slowly round towards the door and there hung, for a second as if out of joint, pressed forward slightly off the equilibrium of the neck; mouths opened for breath, more breath; eyes blank but in their fixture intent upon peering through the fog of shock. Everybody looked at the door. Nobody saw anything.

The barrel organ must have been placed just beyond the upright jambs, probably on the pavement neatly squared with the wall so that the room formed an extra sounding box; indeed, something new and dark was flushed against the frosted glass. The pike-faced man was staring straight into the bolted door, some six inches from his stony bewildered snout. The naval officer and those others had stopped talking, the bar-girls had each lowered their eyes so that now they peered through the drinkers instead of above them. The bicycle bell lay abandoned in the oily boy's hand, slackly extended forward, as if it were offered to the door as a warm wet present. The pin-table youths had struck subtly the attitude of boxers, toes preened, shoulders high and heads forward — while behind them their last little silver balls went hurrying round the garish presentation of a painted, modern city, flashing on lights in the urgent accumulation of silver, red, green, yellow and pale-blue skyscrapers, among Meteor planes and overhead railways, among the short skirts of citizens dressed in rubbery romanish- mediaeval toguettes of the twenty-first century. These lights, in fact, provided now the only movement, they snowballed on and off, faster and faster like a gale warning. And the gale, the metal-belling wind churning through the door rushed straight about that room, entering it and filling it immediately like a flood-wind, grasping round the crevices among the bottles, under the bar, up to the corners at the very ceiling, down underneath the serge-skirted

woman's ankles, round and about Lord Cardigan and everyone who was there, filling, filling the void absolutely. And when this in that thunderous second was done and the place was a block of sound — so other small movements hesitated and began. Smiles! Nods! Shufflings of feet! For at last the explosion was recognized to be music, and well-loved music, a tune of warmth and reminiscence, a wartime tune:

Bless 'em all, bless 'em all,

The long and the short and the tall —

This music rang round the bar, again and again, a circling tune that came back every few seconds to where it had started and then went off again, round and round, waltzing and merry despite its metal fibre.

But merry to no applause. For one by one, like the lights on the pin-table, the smiles cut out. The faces dropped. The heads turned back towards the bar. The shufflings of feet, the beginning of a dance, stopped. The morose emptiness returned; and with it, unceasing, whirling round the room, the giddy music continued. There was no echo. The sound was hard, bright, filling the empty room with metal rods that clashed for breath; only that sound, exact, reporting without echo.

The drinkers drank without flinching. It was suddenly plain — they were beyond flinching, just as they had been beyond keeping up the first smile that had for a moment seemed to warm them. It was just not worth it.

I was reminded then of two things, both strangely to do with big dogs — perhaps dogs with faces so heavy and eyes as mournful as those that now gazed in again at the cash-till. One of these dogs was the bloodhound once seen at the bottom of an escalator in a Tube station. This dog sat like a rock on the platform at the very edge of the immense progression of upward moving empty stairs. His master tried to urge him on, patting, whispering, purring, whistling, and once even kicking. But move the dog would not. He sat absolutely. He sat and stared sadly at the ceaseless stairs emerging from the ground and travelling emptily upwards to Heaven. He seemed to be nodding and saying to himself: 'There, that's another thing they've done . . .'

The other dog is to be found in a quotation from Henri de Montherlant. He writes: "... And for a long time the baron, sitting in his chair, kept that beautiful gravity of face that men get — it almost gives them the illusion of thoughtfulness — when they lose money. Then he sighed. Newfoundland dogs often have a little humidity at the commixture of the eyes, falling like tears. Why do Newfoundland dogs cry? Because they have been tricked."

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA:

Three Poems

Translated by Donald Jenks

Prelude

The poplar trees fade,
but they leave their reflections.

The poplar trees go,
but they leave us the wind.

They leave on the rivers
their echoes afloat.

The fireflies' world
has invaded my memories.

And a shrunken heart
sprouts from my fingers.

Tree of Song

Reed of voice and visage
once and again
hopelessly quavers
in the air of yesterday.

The maiden, sighing,
wanted to pluck it;
but she arrived always
a moment too late.

Ah sun! Ah moon, moon!
a moment too late.
Sixty gray flowers
entangled her feet.

She watches it waver
once and again,
virgin of bloom and spray
in the air of yesterday.

Two Sailors on the Beach

1

He wore in his heart
a fish from the China Sea.

At times one saw it cruising,
diminished by the eyes.

Being seaman he forgot
saloons and oranges.

Looked at the water.

2

He had a soapy tongue.
He washed his words and was still.

Level world, hilly sea,
a hundred stars and his ship.

He saw the balconies of the Pope
and the golden breasts of the Cuban girls.

Looked at the water.

ROBERT W. STALLMAN:

Kafka's Cage

The Hunger-Artist is one of Kafka's perfections and belongs with the greatest short stories of our time. Its theme of the corruption of inter-human relationships, as Winkler defines it, recurs throughout Kafka's work and has its perfect achievement here in this intrinsic whole.

The world of a Kafka story is one of mystery, the mysterious being obtained by a realism that is pushed to the extremes. All his details are simple and commonplace, a critic of *The Castle* points out; but Kafka subjects them "to a transmutation which makes them seem to compete with each other in enveloping us with some weighty secret." The weighty secret remains a mystification for most readers—even for Einstein. "I couldn't read it for its perversity," he is reported to have remarked upon returning a Kafka novel to Thomas Mann. "The human mind isn't complicated enough." One critic of *The Burrow* describes that story as "in itself a 'burrow' of the most complicated construction," with an ingenious system of intertwining tunnels of which he interprets the "inner fortress" alone, "whence the whole structure can be overlooked." The present essay attempts to open up the as yet unlocked cage of *The Hunger-Artist*.

Realism of detail within a framework of symbolism, as Max Lerner says, is Kafka's unique quality and his special gift to modern fiction. His meanings emerge at several planes at once, and the planes are interconnected. Just try to keep to Kafka's facts *as facts*! It is impossible to suppress or to minimize their allegorical overtones. For as facts—and they are not "facts" but purely imaginary phenomena—they resist a literal interpretation. Here at the literal plane, as starting-point for our analysis, are the facts of *The Hunger-Artist*:

The story is about a once popular spectacle staged for the entertainment of a pleasure-seeking public: the exhibition of a professional 'hunger-artist' performing in a cage of straw his stunt of 'fasting.' His cage's sole decoration is a clock. His spectators see him as a trickster and common circus-freak and therefore they expect him to cheat, to break fast on the sly. But fasting is his sole reason for existing, his life purpose; not even under compulsion would he partake of food. For him, to fast is the easiest thing he

can do; and so he says, but no one believes in him. Because the public distrusts him, he is guarded—usually by three butchers—and prevented from fasting beyond a forty-day period, not for humane reasons, but only because patronage stops after that time. His guards tempt him with food and sometimes torture him; yet they break-fast on food supplied at his expense! A great public festival celebrates his achievement, and thus he is “honored by the world.” But when he is removed from his cage he collapses in a rage, not from hunger, but from having been cheated of the honor of fasting on and on and of becoming thus “the greatest hunger-artist of all time.” Though emaciated almost to the point of death, he quickly recovers and after brief recuperation intervals performs again and again.

Nowadays however he has been abandoned for other spectacles. People visit his cage in the circus-tent, but only because it is next to the stables. His spectators are fascinated by the animals. All's changed: There is no clock, and the once beautiful signs to announce the purpose of his act have been torn down. Now no tally is kept of the number of fasting days achieved. There are no guards. “And so the hunger-artist fasted on without hindrance, as he had once dreamed of doing . . . just as he had once predicted, but no one counted the days; no one, not even the hunger-artist himself, knew how great his achievement was and his heart grew heavy.” Thus the world robs him of his reward. Indifference replaces admiration, and on this account he expires. He is buried with the straw of his cage and replaced by a panther, who devours fiercely the food he naturally craves. The people crowd about his cage.

Here then is the matter-of-fact account of the story stripped of interpretation. But every fact seems invested with symbolic significance. For instance, no literal meaning can be ascribed to the bizarre clock in the artist's cage. (A calendar is the logical means for reckoning the artist's fasting days.) This clock does not tick. The unclocked life of the artist outlasts centuries, and periodically he survives starvation sieges that are beyond human endurance. And so it is with all of Kafka's facts: they are symbols and they are fantasies of a dream world. The laws of physics and of biology are defied, the facts of human existence distorted. Kafka's facts ask questions which have their answer at their allegorical meaning level. The literal meaning is not complete or sufficient in its own terms, as James Burnham observes. However resolutely we try to remain at the literal in Kafka, “we always find ourselves being driven and teased and thrust beyond it. The most commonplace phrase, appearing as it will in an irreconcilable context, compels the mind to spin away. We are always walking at the edge of a cliff.”

The Hunger-Artist at its allegorical level provides three possible interpretations: metaphysical, religious, and sociological. All three circles of meaning intersect, almost coinciding one with the other. No circle is closed, each opens onto the adjoining one and projects us into it. Hence no single self-contained system of meaning defines Kafka's intention; no single complete interpretation is possible.

To begin with a metaphysical interpretation, there is the double contrast between (1) the two occupants of the cage, the human and the animal, and (2) between the artist and his observers, the human beings outside who are but closed in animals uncaged. The noble body of the panther fascinates them, and this physical attraction is that which one animal has for another. For them too, their joy in living issues from their throat—and from their belly. They crave the same food and are nourished, literally, by the same sensations and appetites. What a contrast between the hunger-artist, who is no-flesh, and his spectators, who are all-flesh: the panther who consumes flesh, the butcher-guards who destroy flesh, the doctors who cure flesh! But the knife of a butcher is no release for an animal, nor is the knife of a doctor who by saving flesh saves only matter. As for the contrast between the hunger-artist and the panther, these two beings are at once wholly unlike each other and yet identical. The panther complements the hunger-artist and is parodied by him. In the portrait which opens the story the artist is portrayed as:

deathly pale, dressed in black tights, his ribs protruding powerfully, sometimes nodding politely and answering questions with a forced smile, even thrusting his arm through the bars to let them feel his emaciation, and paying attention to no one, ignoring even the striking of the clock which was the cage's sole decoration, looking straight before him with eyes almost closed, and sipping occasionally from a tiny glass of water to wet his lips.

The hunger-artist is an imitation panther. As artist he imitates life: panther-like he appears black, yet a deathly paleness reveals his true self. Time means no more to him than to the panther. And he has no use for a chair, he prefers straw. He nods his head as though beckoning to onlookers, or half-closing his eyes he stares beyond them as though intent upon some inward vision. But what a poor imitation of reality the artist presents! Protruding "powerfully" from him are ribs, only ribs, and the arm he proudly thrusts through the bars discloses not strength but emaciation. (Notice Kafka's wit here: into his parody he injects bathos.)

While the hunger-artist is a part of the sensuous world of matter, he is yet apart from it. Unlike the animal and the human, his being is spiritual and thus "free" from the claims of matter. Their "freedom," by contrast, resides somewhere in the region of their teeth, that is, in their appetite, which is to say that man as animal is never free — never free from that gnawing dissatisfaction which his purely physical appetencies create in him again and again. The hunger-artist — man as spiritual being — has that true freedom which inheres in the soul; still not even he who hungers for the claims of the divine is free from the claims of the body. He too is caged by a human being's "joy in living." One recalls the quotation from St. John of the Cross which T. S. Eliot takes as caption for his *Sweeney Agonistes*: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created things." In the world of *The Hunger-Artist* there exists a radical division between the realm of faith — the religious, the qualitative, the spiritual or the supernatural (symbolized by the mystic-faster) — and the realm of practical reason, the quantitative, the sensuous realm of physical matter (symbolized by the panther and the people). Elsewhere in his writings Kafka declares that "what we call the physical world is the evil in the spiritual one." But we do not need external evidence; the internal evidence is positive enough: In the world of *The Hunger-Artist* there is this dichotomy between divine and human, and this dichotomy approaches the absolute.

There is a passage in James Burnham's "Observations on Kafka" (*Partisan Review*: March, 1947) which defines Kafka's metaphysics: "His world is split by the absolute Manichaeian division into Good and Evil, which is identified with the division between Light and Darkness, Spirit and Matter. . . . As with all Manichaeians, the ambivalence remains: *he [Kafka] longs for Matter, for the evil natural social world, at the same time that he denies it; he is appalled by Spirit even while he must seek it absolutely.*" (Italics mine.) Kafka's hunger-artist represents Kafka's doctrine that "There is only a spiritual world; what we call the physical world is the evil in the spiritual one, and what we call evil is only a necessary moment in our endless development." *The Hunger-Artist* is a kind of critique of this doctrine, for here Matter triumphs over Spirit. Though the tone of the story is one of lament for the passing of the hunger-artist, for his decline and death, none the less all the logic is weighted against his efforts at autarchy. As for our neglect of hunger-artists, our present-day

practice of honoring a real panther has more to be said for it than our former-day practice of honoring a fake one. The hunger-artist seeks Spirit absolutely; he denies the "evil natural social world" at the same time that he longs for it. And this is his dilemma, even as it is ours. It is not possible for man to achieve a condition of pure spirituality, nor again is it possible for him to achieve a synthesis of spirit and matter. As the agent of divine purity the hunger-artist is a failure. His failure is signified, for instance, on the occasion when he answers the person who has explained his emaciation as being caused by a lack of food: he answers "by flying into a rage and terrifying all those around him by shaking the bars of his cage like a wild animal." This reversion to the animal divests him momentarily of the divine, and it also betrays the split-soul conflict within him. His location next to the stables serves as reminder that the claims of the animal body are necessary claims upon the soul and cannot be denied. And this is true even though matter is wholly evil (i.e., "the evil odors from the stalls," etc.); complete separation from reality can never be obtained. (Compare the idea of "complete detachment from the earth" as it figures in *The Burrow*.) Pure Spirit is as vacuous as Pure Matter.

Nowadays (to bring this history down to current times) that dualism between Spirit and Matter, which had its two-part representation in the hunger-artist and the insatiable hunger-multitude, is nonexistent since one part of the dualism no longer has representation—the mystic-faster is dead. "Fasting" no longer means anything to us; nor did it in former times—except that then it was at least celebrated (albeit not without hypocrisy), honored by rituals conscientiously enacted from fast day to fast day. Everyone attended His service daily, and regular subscribers sat (as in church-pews) "before the small latticed cage for days on end." Everyone pretended to marvel at his holy feat, but not one worshiper had Faith. Yet for centuries he submitted again and again to crucifixion by these pretenders, a martyr for his cause. Because "it was the stylish thing to do," the multitude attended his "small latticed cage" as they would a confessional box. But the hunger-artist as priest hears no confession. Indeed since the multitude does not understand what faith is, it has no sin to confess. Apart from a few acolytes to His Cult, all mankind disbelieves this Christ who many times died for man's sake. And when He dies, see how the disbelievers exploit the drama of His death:

But now there happened the thing which always happened at this point. The impressario would come, and silently—for the music rendered speech impossible—he would raise his arms over the hunger-artist as if inviting heaven to look down upon its work here upon the straw, this pitiful martyr—and martyr the hunger-artist was, to be sure, though in an entirely different sense. Then he would grasp the hunger-artist about his frail waist, trying as he did to make it obvious by his exaggerated caution with what a fragile object he was dealing, and after surreptitiously shaking him a little and causing his legs to wobble and his body to sway uncontrollably, would turn him over to the ladies, who had meanwhile turned as pale as death.

The ladies who so cruelly sentimentalize over his martyrdom represent sympathy without understanding, a sympathy which is self-sentiment. One of them weeps, but not for him. She breaks into tears only in shame for having touched him. It is a mock lamentation these two Marys perform.

And the entire weight of his body, light though it was, rested upon one of the ladies, who, breathless and looking about imploringly for help (she had not pictured this post of honor thus), first tried to avoid contact with the hunger-artist by stretching her neck as far as possible, and then . . . she broke into tears to the accompaniment of delighted laughter from the audience . . .

What a difference between the theme of the Virgin mourning the loss of her Son as treated in Kafka's parody and as depicted in the famous *Avignon Pieta* or in Giotto's *Lamentation*.

It is thus that the religious and the metaphysical meanings of *The Hunger-Artist* coincide: (1) Christ is truly dead. Our post-Renaissance world has discarded the act of faith from its reality. (2) For the superannuated mystic there is no resurrection because today not Spirit but Matter alone is recognized. And it is recognized, this triumph of matter over spirit, even by the dying mystic, who ends a skeptic and a defeatist (not unlike Kafka himself). I had to fast, he admits, because I could find no food to my liking. Fasting is my destiny. But "If I had found it, believe me, I should have caused no stir, I should have eaten my fill just as you do, and all the others." Those were his last words, but in his glazed eyes there remained the firm, though no longer proud, conviction that he was still fasting." Here is the key to his enigma. So the fanatic quest of the hunger-artist, to quote Miss Magny, who has a short note on *The Hunger-Artist* in her critical essay "The Objective Depiction of Absurdity" (in *The Kafka Prob-*

lem), "So the insatiable hunger, the divine nostalgia that possesses the mystic or artist perhaps is at bottom only some lack, something unsatisfiable, a fundamental maladjustment, the sign of an imperfect soul."

As metaphysical allegory *The Hunger-Artist* portrays the dilemma of modern man: his spiritual disunity. The story is about man's search for his own meaning: what is man, Matter or Spirit? As sociological allegory *The Hunger-Artist* presents the dilemma of the modern artist: his dissociation from the world in which he lives. Translated into sociological terms, the division is between the artist and his society; in metaphysical terms, between the divine and the human, the soul and the body. The consequence of the corruption of the individual integrity is a corruption of inter-human relationships. There is spiritual disunity *within* the individual artist and a spiritual disunity *between* the artist and his materialistic public. (His isolation is symbolized by the cage.) The artist cannot believe in himself, nor can his public believe in him. The loneliness of the artist (in his "ivory tower"), as Miss Magny phrases it, "is the aloneness of the Mount of Olives with the spitting, the insults and the sponge soaked in gall . . ." For his aesthetic vision the artist has to die daily and be reborn, but his artistic devotion cannot be an end in itself. The artist as poet, no less than the artist as mystic, cannot survive in isolation from society. "Against this lack of understanding, this universal lack of understanding, it was impossible to fight." The division between artist and society can be bridged only by a reciprocal act of faith. But "Just try to explain the art of fasting to some one! He who has no feeling for it simply cannot comprehend it." As the initiated alone understood, "the hunger-artist would never under any circumstances, not even under compulsion, partake of any nourishment during the period of fasting. His honor as an artist forbade such a thing." The integrity of the artist is absolute, but his values are relative. His Ivory Tower is truly a cage. To point Kafka's satire, the artists of the 'Nineties, those pure aesthetes, retreated from life with a gospel of Art for Art's Sake and the disdain of Villiers de l'Isle Adam—"As for living, our servants will do that for us." But life is not irrelevant to art; the material conditions, however delimiting their influence, nourish the creative imagination. Life is at once the subject of art and its wellspring. Art and Life, Spirit and Matter—each fulfills the ever-unfulfilled appetencies of the other. Of course the artist can "fast" as no one else can do. We concede, "*in view of the peculiar*

nature of this art which showed no flagging with increased age," the artist's claim of limitless capacity for fasting. But pure creativeness is nothing; the creative imagination must feed upon reality. *Art is but a vision of reality.*

True, the artist in the Renaissance and Middle Ages "lived in apparent glory, honored by the world." He had his patron, the impresario who profited from the exhibition and shared the adulatory applause; his critics, the butchers who watched over his creative activity (and always misjudged it); and his historians, the attendants who bibliographed his creative acts or achievements in works produced. An imitation panther in a cage, he was admired for his craftsmanship in imitating life, but not being distinguished from any other circus performer by "the pleasure-seeking multitude" he was taken as "no more than a source of amusement." Society exploited all his deaths and resurrections; it crucified him again and again, not by hostility but by distrust and utter indifference. Hence his despair, the issue of this universal distrust which made his act of creation so difficult for him, and which "filled [him] with a gloomy melancholy which was deepened by the fact that no one understood it." It is our glorification of the practical vision at the expense of the religious and aesthetic vision and the resultant loss of spiritual belief that is Kafka's *Hunger-Artist* theme. Society and the artist, each disbelieves in the other. But the artist disbelieves even in himself. It was a gnawing doubt that truly emaciated him. His unhappiness results from the dualism within himself between the aesthetic and the practical insights, the dichotomy dissociating his spiritual self from his practical being. The aesthetic soul subsists in the physical body, in the realm of matter or not at all. His denial of the realm of matter, the denial which his emaciation signifies, is only one source of his "constant state of depression." The artist is equally at fault even as the society which repudiates him, for he repudiates life itself. By his perverse denial of reality the artist's truths are *mummy truths, whereat the living mock*. His art is *not a vision of reality*. Hence the rejection of the emaciated body of art for the healthy body of life (the panther). Perhaps it wasn't his fasting to attain aesthetic perfection that made the artist so emaciated; "perhaps his emaciation came solely from his dissatisfaction with himself" — solely from dissatisfaction with the pure aesthetic vision he too fervently hungered to attain. Thus, "though longing impatiently for these visits [of the living on their way "to the eagerly-awaited barns"], which he naturally saw as his reason for existence, [he] couldn't help

feeling at the same time a certain apprehension." He apprehends the necessity of an existence outside the cage and realizes that an absolutism of pure aestheticism is artistic and spiritual death. The people were on their way to the stables, he became convinced, "and his experience in this matter overcame even the most stubborn, almost conscious self-deception." His disillusionment is his apprehension of the fact that art has no sovereignty over life. As for his solipsistic belief that only "he who was the faster could be at the same time a completely satisfied spectator of his fasting," suppose that he had attained his illusionary ideal of artistic purity—as absolute spectator of his triumph over nature he could never comprehend his spiritual achievement without measuring it from the relative world of its physical embodiment. His death-mask conviction of final triumph is a mockery, for the triumph is an empty one.

It is the clock in the cage that triumphs over the artist. Time triumphs over the artist who denies the flux of time, which is his present reality. The clock in the cage is a mockery of the artist's faith in his *artifice of eternity*. The tragedy of Kafka's hunger-artist is not that he dies but that he fails to die into life. As he dies he seeks recognition from the world he has all his lifetime repudiated: "‘I always wanted you to admire my fasting,’ said the hunger-artist." It is his confession that the sovereignty of the soul (or of the aesthetic experience) is but an illusion, that spirit is nothing if isolated from matter. It is his confession that the artist must come to terms with his life, with the civilization in which he lives, with reality. "Forgive me, all of you," he whispers to the circus-manager, as though in confessional before a priest; and they forgive him—for his blasphemy against nature.

KENNETH BURKE:

Criticism for the Next Phase

ROSEMOND TUVE: *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*.
University of Chicago Press.

Let's begin this review with a Word to the Wise, a market tip. Namely: if you think you are seriously interested in literary criticism, *get this book*. And if you don't find it both engrossing and rewarding, here's another tip: give up the idea that you are seriously interested in literary criticism. Probably you

are but a poetaster, or a frustrated novelist, who would conceal the truth from himself by improvising impressionistic translations of original works.

Rosemond Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* is particularly important, in our opinion, because it can mark a *stage* in literary criticism. Here, clearly observable, is a *major position* among the several which any critic must incorporate into his thinking, if he would develop a well-rounded terminology for the analysis of literature now. It is not an original book (ironically, much of its value resides in the fact that it is not original); it is good because it shows such maturity and independence of judgment in the recovery of an earlier tradition. But we venture the blunt flat assertion that no really well-rounded criticism can be written today unless the critic can make himself at home in such thinking as this book embodies.

The immediate purpose of the book is to correct a present-day misreading of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry by applying to this poetry the critical methods and criteria flourishing at the time when the poetry was written. The result, had the author been so minded, could have been almost rousing bellicose. For underlying the work, quietly and often imperceptibly, there is a thesis which, with but a little "pointing up" for the purposes of rhetorical saliency, could make some of our *best* contemporary critics look almost comically nude, when they pontificate on the poetry of the Metaphysicals. By a patient and scholarly reconsideration of the earlier criticism, she shows convincingly that it is well qualified to analyze the forms and purposes of the best poetry then being written; and in the course of this task she shows, just as convincingly, that some of our best modern critics did a monstrously incongruous thing, in applying unsuitable contemporary Symbolist and post-Symbolist criteria to this earlier work.

The book is divided into two parts. The first deals with "Sensuousness and Significancy as Functions of Imagery." Here we have a very perceptive inquiry into such matters as

"embellished Nature" as poetic subject; "delight" or pleasure as part (or all) of the poet's aim; the demand for "significancy"; the acceptance, for poetry, of certain aims (the didactic) and certain methods (abstract "statement") of reasonable discourse; the demand for rhetorical efficacy; and, most pervasively influential of all critical concepts, "Decorum" as a regulative principle.

The second section deals with "The Logical Functions of Imagery." Here, it seems to me, is the place at which the book begins to transcend its immediate purpose, suggesting ways of thought that must be systematically adapted to the study of imagery in general. But the author's concern is still with the immediate application, to the study of the image as used in Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry. She is advocating no mechanical application of pre-Symbolist criteria to post-Symbolist writing—since such a procedure would be but the reverse of the fallacy she is exposing.

But the important consideration, for criticism generally, is this: Far too often, today, the study of imagery has reduced a piece of literature to a mass of jelly. A writer's work is described as though it were no more defined than a smell of gas. And repeatedly, we find books of criticism saluted though they contain not one single analysis of formal development nor any method which could be applied to such ends.

Over and above its worth in correcting a current misevaluation of certain past literary movements, this book on *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* is particularly valuable, it seems to me, for its contribution in restoring logical and formal criteria to the study of imagery. There may be respects in which the "logical" and the "imaginative" are antithetical to each other. There may be cases where imagery is little more than a smell of gas, or even an imperceptible gas which nonetheless acts to put the reader into a semi-comatose state. But these thorough pages on the Logical Function of Imagery should go far, with an intelligent reader, towards breaking down the spontaneous assumption, so generally rife in modern esthetic theory, that the "logical" and the "imaginative" are always necessarily antithetical to each other.

Closely connected with this, is her sharp reintroduction of *rhetoric* into the analysis of imagery. We thus get a clear picture of the ways in which logic, rhetoric, and poetic are interwoven (in contrast with the doctrines of those who would confine logic to science, rhetoric to propaganda or advertising, and thus leave for poetic a few spontaneous sensations not much higher in the intellectual scale than the twitchings of a decerebrated frog).

To be sure, when all the returns are in, some further adjustments will be found necessary. The author's very stress upon imagery, for instance, reflects a modern era in which the term, "Imagination," has taken on a complexity of meaning which it did not characteristically have in pre-Romantic terminologies. "Imagination" is now a club-offer, or Miscellany, with meanings ranging all the way from the visible, tangible, here-and-now to the mystically transcendent, from the purely sensory and empirical, even the scientifically factual, to the dramatically emphatic and sympathetic, from the literal to the fantastic, including all the shades of sentiment, emotion, and judgment, plus the "unconscious" (or the various varieties of "unconscious," for this catch-all term is capable of division, *demands* division, and many of the slovenly critical tributes to the power of the "unconscious" in "Imagination" reflect little more than the critic's "unconscious" realization that his very term, "Imagination," is much like the dusty clutter in an old attic). And only insofar as "Imagination" is cleared up, (as Richards did *not* clear it up) can we expect to see the subject of "imagery" cleared up (and v.v.). But, in the meantime, we might well ponder this: Insofar as a poet's images are organically related, there is a *formal principle* behind them. They could be said to *body forth* this principle. The principle itself could, by a properly discerning critic, be named in terms of *ideas*. And thus, the imagery could be said to convey an invisible intangible idea in terms of visible, tangible things. (Is this Platonism? Or isn't it just a technical statement about organic poetic language?)

Meanwhile, bring together all three—logic, rhetoric, and poetic—in the analysis of imagery, with the proper rationale for doing so, and you are ready for the Next Phase. Because Rosemond Tuve's book on *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, "imaginatively" following old texts, does this so well, I consider it a very important book for literary criticism.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, and JULY 2, 1946

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State of Illinois

County of Champaign

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Kerker Quinn, who, having been duly sworn according to law, desposes and says that he is the editor of ACCENT and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership and management of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (section 437, P. L. & R.) to wit:

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